THE

# LIFE

OF

# VOLTAIRE,

BY THE

MARQUIS DE CONDORCET.

To which are added,

## MEMOIRS OF VOLTAIRE,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

*LONDON:*

PRINTED FOR G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATER-NOSTER-ROW.

M, DCC, XC.

# THE

# LIFE

OF

# VOLTAIRE,

BY THE

MARQUIS DE CONDORCET.

To which are added,

## MEMOIRS OF VOLTAIRE,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

43
B. B.
TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.
73.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATER-
NOSTER-ROW.
M.DCC.XC.

# THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE.

THE life of Voltaire should necessarily be the history of the progress of the arts as promoted by his genius, of the power which he exercised over the opinions of his age, and of the long war which in his youth he declared against prejudice, and which he maintained to the day of his death.

When the influence of a philoſopher extends itſelf to the multitude, when it is ſudden and felt at each inſtant of his life, he is indebted for this influence to his character, to his mode of obſervation, and to his conduct, as much as to his works. Every circumſtance relating to ſuch a man promotes the ſtudy of the human mind; with which we cannot hope to become acquainted if we do not obſerve its properties as they exiſt in thoſe to whom Nature has been prodigal of her riches and her power, and if we do not ſeek in their minds what they poſſeſs in common with others, and in what they are diſtinguiſhed. Man is in general indebted for his opinions, and

equality.

naturally

friend,

Ninon had taken delight in the pupil
ed,

The

Marquis

M. de Voltaire became enamoured of one of her daughters; and the mother, finding that the only advantage that could

making

making improper remarks. Their complaints to the ambassador, were for his detaining the young dependent to continue his visits to Mademoiselle du Noyer, and sent him back to his family for having disobeyed his orders.

Madame du Noyer failed not to print this story with the letters of the young Argent to her daughter, hoping that this sketch will know how to promote the sale of the book, instead of her maternal severity and delicacy in the very libel in which she proclaimed her daughter's dishonour.

The flaming sentiments of the author of Zaïre and Tancred are not discoverable in making

in these letters. The sensations of impassioned youth are strong, but their gradations it is unable to distinguish; it neither can select those strong and rapid traits which characterise passion, nor find terms which paint its feelings to the imagination, and infuse them into the soul of the reader; while devoured by love, the most sincere and the most ardent, it is apparently dull, cold, or extravagant. The talent of painting the passions for the theatre appears to be one of the last which discovers itself in poets. Racine had given no tokens of it either in *Les Freres Ennemis*, or in *Alexandre*; and Brutus preceded Zaïre. Not only, must the passions have been

ſcin before they can be deſcribed, but their antiquity and effects muſt have been regarded when they have ceaſed to live in the mind; and when they exiſt only in the recollection. The heart is ſufficient to make us ſenſible of their exiſtence; but, to expreſs them with energy and truth, the ſoul muſt have long been under their influence, and experience muſt have been improved by reflection.

The youth, when returned to Paris, ſoon forgot his love; but he did not forget to uſe every effort that he might wreſt a young and eſtimable woman, who was natively virtuous, from a cor-

rupt

rupt and intriguing mother. He employed the zeal of Proselytism*. He was aided by several bishops, and even jesuits. The project failed, but Voltaire had afterward the good fortune to be of service to Mademoiselle du Noyer, when she had married the Baron de Vinterfeld.

His father, however, finding him unfit in writing poetry, and living at large, forbade him his house. The most submissive letters made no impression on him; the son even asked permission to go to America, provided that before his

* *Il instruisoit le zèle du Proselitisme*; the meaning, I imagine, is, that he made her a convert from the protestant to the catholick faith.

departure he might but be permitted to kneel at his feet; but there was no choice, he must determine not to depart for America, but to bind himself to an attorney. He did not here remain long; M. de Caumartin, the friend of M. Arouet, pitied the fate of his son, and requested permission to take him to St. Ange; where, removed from those societies which alarmed paternal affection, he might reflect on, and make choice of a profession. Here he met with Caumartin, the elder, a respectable old man, who was passionately fond of Henry the IVth, and Sully, at that time too much forgotten by the nation. Caumartin had been intimate with the best informed

men

men of the reign of Louis the XIVth, and was acquainted with the most secret anecdotes, such as they really happened. These he took a pleasure to recount, and Voltaire returned from St. Ange, occupied by the project of writing an epic poem, of which Henry the IVth should be the hero, and ardently desirous of studying the History of France. To this journey are we indebted for the Henriade, and the age of Louis XIV.

The death of this monarch was recent; the people, of whom he long had been the idol, the very people who had pardoned his profusion, his wars, and his despotism, and had applauded his

persecution of the protestants, insulted his memory by testifying indecent joy. A bull obtained from Rome against a book of devotion, had occasioned the Parisians to forget the glory of which they so long had been enamoured. Satires on the memory of Louis the Great were as numerous as eulogies had been during his life. Voltaire being accused of having written one of these satires, was sent to the bastile. The poem ended with the following line:

*J'ai vu ces maux, et je n'ai pas vingt ans* *.

Voltaire was then upwards of two and twenty, and the police took this confor-

* These evils have I seen, yet have not reached my twentieth year.

nity of age to be sufficient to deprive him of his liberty.

It was in the Bastile that the young poet sketched his poem of the League, corrected his tragedy of Oedipus, which he had begun long before, and wrote some merry verses on the misfortune of being there a prisoner. The regent Duke of Orleans, being informed of his innocence, restored him to freedom, and granted him a recompence.

"I thank your royal highness," said Voltaire, "for having provided me with food, but I hope you will not, hereafter, trouble yourself concerning my lodging."

The tragedy of Oedipus was performed in 1718. The author had hitherto been known only by his fugitive pieces, by some epistles which breathed the spirit of Chaulieu, but written more correctly, and by an ode which had vainly contended for the prize bestowed by the French academy; to this a ridiculous piece, written by the Abbé du Jarri, had been preferred. The theme proposed by the academy was the decoration of the altar of Notre Dame; for Louis the XIVth, after having reigned seventy years, recollected it was time to perform the promise of Louis the XIIIth. Thus was the subject of the first serious poem, written by Voltaire, devotion. Possessed

of

of native and unerring taste, he would not mingle the passion of love with a tale so horrid as that of Oedipus; and had been daring enough to present his piece to the theatre without having paid this tribute to custom. But it was rejected. The assembled comedians took it amiss that the author should dare to dispute their judgment. "The young man well deserves," said Dufresne, "as a punishment for his pride, that his tragedy should be played with the long vile scene which he has translated from Sophocles."

Voltaire was obliged to cede, and to insert a whole episode of love. The piece was applauded, though in despight

of

of the epiſodes; and the long vile ſcene from Sophocles inſured its ſucceſs. La Motte, who was at that time the firſt among men of letters, ſaid in his approbation that this tragedy gave promiſe of a worthy ſucceſſor to Corneille and Racine; and the homage thus rendered by a rival, whoſe fame was eſtabliſhed, and who had reaſon to fear he might ſee himſelf ſurpaſſed, muſt for ever do honour to the character of La Motte.

But Voltaire, proclaimed a man of genius and a philoſopher to a croud of inferior authors and fanaticks of all ſects, even then gained a combination of enemies, whom the riſing generations of

ſixty

sixty years have continued to supply, and who often have molested his long and glorious career. The following celebrated lines—

*Nos Prêtres ne sont pas ce qu'un sot peuple pense;*
*Notre Crédulité fait toute leur Science* *.

were the first signal of a war, which not even the death of Voltaire could extinguish.

At one of the representations of Oedipus, Voltaire appeared on the stage, bearing up the train of the high priest. The Marchioness de Villars asked who

* Our priests are not what the foolish people suppose; their whole knowledge is derived from our credulity.

was

was that young man who wished the piece might be condemned; ſhe was told it was the author. This thoughtleſs act, which ſpoke a man ſo ſuperior to the trifling anxieties of ſelf-love, made the marchioneſs deſirous of his acquaintance. Voltaire, being admitted her viſitor, conceived a paſſion for her, the firſt, and the moſt ſerious he ever felt. He was unſucceſsful; and was for a conſiderable time diverted from ſtudy, which had already become neceſſary to his exiſtence. He never, afterwards, mentioned this ſubject but with a ſenſation of regret, and almoſt of remorſe.

Having

Having freed himſelf from his paſſion, he continued the Henriade; and wrote the tragedy of Artémire. An actreſs, whom he had formed, and who was at once his miſtreſs and his pupil, played the principal character. The public, who had done juſtice to Oedipus, was (to ſay the leaſt) ſevere to Artémire. This is a common conſequence of ſucceſs; nor is ſecret averſion for acknowledged ſuperiority the only cauſe, though this averſion has the art to profit by a natural feeling which renders us more difficult to be pleaſed in proportion as we have more to hope.

This

This tragedy was of no other value to Voltaire than that of obtaining permission for him to return to Paris, whence he had been banished by his intimacy with the enemies of the regent, and among others with the Duke de Richelieu and the famous Baron de Gortz. Thus did this ambitious man, whose vast projects included all Europe, and threatened to overturn its governments, chuse a young poet for his friend and almost for his confident. Men of genius seek for, and at once know each other; they have a common language, which they alone can speak and understand.

In

In 1722, Voltaire accompanied Madame de Rupelmonde into Holland. He was desirous, at Brussels, of being acquainted with Rousseau, whose misfortunes he pitied, and whose poetic talent he esteemed. The love of his art was too powerful for that just contempt which he ought to have conceived for the character of Rousseau. Voltaire consulted him on his Poem on the League; and read his Epistle to Uranie to him, written for Madame de Rupelmonde. This poem was the first monument of his freedom of thinking, and of his talent of treating on moral and metaphysical subjects in verse, and of rendering them popular.



Rousseau,

Rousseau, on his part, read an Ode addressed to Posterity, which Voltaire, as it is pretended, then told him would never arrive at the place to which it was addressed. He likewise read the Judgment of Pluto, which was as quickly forgotten as the ode. The two poets parted irreconcileable foes. Rousseau violently attacked Voltaire, who continued patiently to suffer during fifteen years. It is astonishing to think that the author of so many licentious epigrams, in which the clergy were continually made the subject of ridicule and opprobium, should seriously assign the thoughtless behaviour of Voltaire during mass and his Epistle to Urania as the cause

of

of his hatred. But Rouſſeau had aſſumed the maſk of devotion, which was then an honourable aſylum for ſuch as had ſuffered in the world's opinion; a ſafe and commodious aſylum, which philoſophy, among the other evils of which it is accuſed, has unfortunately, for hypocrites, eternally cloſed.

In 1724, Voltaire preſented the world with Mariamne, which was but Artémire under new names, but with a leſs complicated and leſs romantic fable. It was written in the very ſtyle of Racine, and was forty times performed. In his preface, the author oppoſed the opinion of La Motte who, poſſeſſed of much un-

derstanding and reason, but little sensible of the charms of harmony, discovered no other merit in versification than that of difficulties overcome, nor any thing more than a formal custom, in poetry, invented to ease the memory, and to which habit alone had attributed charms. In his letters, printed at the end of Oedipus, he had before combatted the opinions of the same poet, who regarded the observance of the three Unities as another prejudice.

We ought to think ourselves obliged to those who, like La Motte, dare to oppose common and received opinions. In order to defend ancient rules, they

muſt neceſſarily be examined; and if received opinions, on examination, be found true, we enjoy the advantage of believing that from reaſon to which we had previouſly given our aſſent from habit; if falſe, the world is then freed from an error.

It is no uncommon thing, however, for men to be angry at thoſe who oblige them to ſcrutinize what had been admitted upon truſt. The minds, which, like that of Montaigne, quietly ſlumber on the pillow of ſcepticiſm, are not common; and ſtill leſs common are thoſe who are tormented by the deſire of diſcovering truth. The vulgar love to

believe without proof; and to cheriſh their ſecurity in blind faith, as a thing neceſſary to their eaſe and ſafety.

About the ſame time, the Henriade appeared under the name of the League: an imperfect copy, ſtole from the author, was clandeſtinely printed, in which there were not only parts omitted, but ſome vacancies were ſupplied.

Thus France was at length poſſeſſed of an Epic Poem. It muſt be regretted, no doubt, that Voltaire, the fables of whoſe tragedies are ſo full of action, who has made the paſſions ſpeak a language ſo natural and ſo true, and who could

could paint them ſo effectually as well by analizing their ſentiments as by their ſudden ebullitions, ſhould not have diſplayed in the Henriade thoſe talents which never before were combined in the ſame man to ſo great a degree. Yet, a ſubject ſo well known and ſo recent gave but little room for the imagination of the poet. The gloomy and perſecuting ſpirit of fanaticiſm, exerciſing itſelf on ſubaltern characters, could excite little more than horror. The chiefs of the league were animated by an ambition which hypocriſy debaſed. The hero of the poem, gallant, brave, and humane, but continually ſubject to misfortune which alighted on him alone,

could interest only by his courage and his clemency. Nor was it possible that the unnatural conversion of Henry the IVth. should form an heroic catastrophe.

But though the Henriade in pathos, variety, and action, be inferior to those epic poems which were then in possession of universal admiration, yet by how many new beauties was this inferiority compensated? Never was philosophy so profound and so true, embellished by verses more sublime or more affecting. What other poem presents to us characters drawn with greater strength and dignity, and without offence to histori-

cal fage? What other contains morality more pure, humanity more enlightened, or is more free from the errors of prejudice and vulgar paſſion? Whether the poet cauſes his characters to act or ſpeak, whether he paints the crimes of fanaticiſm, or the charms and the dangers of love, whether he tranſports his hearer to the field of battle, or into that heaven which he himſelf created, he is every where a philoſopher, and is every where deeply intent on promoting the true intereſts of the human race. In the very palace of fiction, we behold truth ſublimely riſe, and always painted in the moſt ſplendid and pureſt colours.

Of all epic poems, the Henriade alone has a moral purport; not that it can be ſaid to be the devellopement of one ſingle truth, which is a pedantic idea and to which a poet cannot ſubject himſelf, but becauſe it breathes throughout a deteſtation of war and fanaticiſm, and a ſpirit of toleration and humanity. Each poem neceſſarily wears the complexion of the age in which it took birth; and the birth of the Henriade was in the age of reaſon. Hence, the greater the progreſs of reaſon among mankind the greater will be their admiration of this poem.

The

The Henriade may be compared to the Æneid: both bear the ſtamp of genius in whatever depended on the poet, and the defects of both are in the choice of the ſubject, which was mutually dictated by a national ſpirit. Virgil, however, intended only to flatter Roman pride; but Voltaire had the more noble motive of preſerving the French from fanaticiſm, by a recapitulation of the crimes into which their anceſtors had been hurried.

The Henriade, Oedipus, and Mariamne had placed Voltaire much above his cotemporaries; and ſeemed to ſecure a life of fame, when his repoſe was troubled

troubled by a fatal accident. He had returned a satirical answer to some contemptuous words which had been spoken by a courtier, who revenged himself by causing Voltaire to be insulted by his servants without endangering his personal safety. The outrage was committed at the gate of the Hotel de Sully, where he had dined; nor did the Duke de Sully deign to shew any resentment; being, no doubt, persuaded that the descendants of the Franks had preserved the right of life and death over the Gauls. Justice remained mute; the parliament of Paris, which had caused far less misdemeanours to be punished when committed against one of its own subalterns,

ſubaltern, imagined nothing was due to an undignified citizen, although the greateſt man of literature the nation poſſeſſed, and kept ſilence.

Voltaire was deſirous of taking thoſe means to revenge offended honour which the manners of modern nations have authoriſed, but which their laws have proſcribed. The Baſtile, and, at the end of ſix months, an order to quit Paris were the puniſhment of his firſt ſtep. The Cardinal de Fleury had not ſo much policy as even to denote the ſlighteſt mark of diſſatisfaction againſt the aggreſſor. Thus when men are unprotected by the laws they are puniſhed by arbitrary

arbitrary power for ſeeking that revenge, which the want of protection renders legal, and which is preſcribed as neceſſary to the principles of honour. We venture to believe that the rights of man will be more reſpected in our times, that the laws will not remain impotent from any ridiculous prejudice of birth, and that when any quarrel ſhall happen between two citizens no miniſter will deprive him who received the firſt offence of his freedom.

Voltaire made a ſecret journey to Paris, but to no effect. He there met with more than one adverſary, who diſpoſed at pleaſure of judicial power and

and miniſterial authority, and who could ſafely effect his ruin. He buried himſelf in retirement, and diſdained longer to ſeek revenge; or, rather, revenged himſelf by overwhelming his enemy with the weight of his increaſing fame, and forcing him to hear the name which he wiſhed to degrade inceſſantly repeated with acclamation throughout all Europe.

England was his place of refuge. Newton was no more; but his ſpirit was infuſed into his countrymen, whom he had taught to truſt to experiment, and calculation only in the ſtudy of nature. Locke, whoſe death was likewiſe recent,

had

had been the firſt to give the theory of the human underſtanding founded on experience, and to ſhew the path which may ſafely be followed in metaphyſical purſuits. The philoſophy of Shaftesbury, commented on by Bolingbroke, and embelliſhed by the verſification of Pope, had given birth in England to that deiſm which announced morality, founded on motives ſuch as might affect great minds without offence to reaſon.

In France, mean time, the men of moſt underſtanding were labouring to ſubſtitute in our ſchools the hypotheſis of Des Cartes, for the abſurdities of ſcholaſtick philoſophy. Any theſis, in which either

either the ſyſtem of Copernicus or that of the Vortices was maintained, with a victory over prejudice. Innate ideas, in the eyes of the devout, were become almoſt an article of faith; though they had at firſt been ſuppoſed heretical. Malebranche, whom men imagined they underſtood, was the philoſopher in faſhion. He was ſuppoſed a free-thinker, who allowed himſelf to regard the exiſtence of the five propoſitions, in the unintelligible Book of Janſenius, as a thing in which the happineſs of the human race was not concerned, or who had the temerity to read Bayle without the permiſſion of a doctor in divinity.

This

This contraſt could not but excite the enthuſiaſm of a man, who, like Voltaire, had from his infancy ſhaken off prejudice. The example of England ſhewed him that truth was not formed to remain in ſecret among a few philoſophers, and men of the world, the pupils of theſe philoſophers, who laughed with them at thoſe errors of which the people are the victims, but became themſelves the defenders of error, when their office or their rank made it their intereſt, ſuppoſed or real, and were ready to proſcribe or even to perſecute their preceptors ſhould they venture to ſpeak what they themſelves privately believed.

From

From this moment, Voltaire felt himself called to be the destroyer of prejudice of every kind, of which his country was the slave. He felt the possibility of succeeding by a happy mixture of boldness and pliability, by knowing when to recede and when to advance, by artfully and alternately employing reason, ridicule, the charms of poetry, and theatrical effect, and by simplifying truth so as to render it popular, amiable, and fashionable, without offence to frivolity. This good project, of rendering himself, by the force of his own genius, the benefactor of a whole nation, whence he meant to banish error, fired the mind of Voltaire, and inspired him with forti-

-vide. He swore to this to consecrate his life; and he kept his vow.

The tragedy of Brutus was the first fruits of his journey to England.

The French theatre had not, since Cinna, breathed the haughty accents of freedom; and they had, there, been smothered by those of revenge. In Brutus, the strength of Corneille was discovered with additional pomp and splendor, combined with that simplicity which Corneille wanted, and the uniform elegance of Racine. Never were the rights of an oppressed people displayed

played with greater power, pleasantry, and even precision, than in the former scene of Brutus. The fifth act is equally remarkable for its pathos. The poet has been reproached for having made love a part of a subject so awful and terrible, and particularly love, which is deficient in interest; but, had the amours of Titus been any other than love, he would have been debased, the fortune of Brutus would not then have rent the hearts of the spectators, and had love been rendered too pathetic it would have been to be feared that love would have destroyed the cause of liberty. It was after this piece had been acted that Fontenelle told Voltaire "He did not

think his genius proper for tragedy, and that his ſtyle was too bold, pompous, and ſplendid."—"If ſo," replied Voltaire, "I will go and read your paſtorals."

He ſuppoſed, at this time, he might aſpire to a place in the French academy; and he might well have been thought modeſt to have waited ſo long. But he had not ſo much as the honour of dividing the votes of the academicians. The fat De Boſe pronounced in a dictatorial tone, that Voltaire ſhould never be one of their dignified members.

This De Boſe, whoſe name is now forgotten, was one of theſe men, who,

with little mind, and not too much knowledge, obtain admiſſion among men of rank and power, and ſucceed preciſely becauſe they neither have the wit to inſpire fear, nor to humble the ſelf-love of thoſe who ſeek the reputation of patroniſing men of letters. De Boſe was become a perſon of importance. He exerciſed the office of inſpector of new publications; which is an uſurpation on the part of the magiſtrate, over men of letters, to whom the avidity of the rich and the powerful have left no employments but thoſe whoſe execution requires the exertion of knowledge and talents.

After Brutus, Voltaire wrote the death of Cæsar; a subject which had previously been chosen by Shakspere, some leeches of whom he imitated and embellished. The tragedy was not played till several years had elapsed, and then in a college; he durst not risk a piece on the stage, destitute of love and of women, and which was likewise a tragedy in three acts: for it is not the most trifling innovations which excite the least clamour among the enemies of novelty; little things necessarily impress themselves on little minds. Still, however, a bold, noble, and figurative, yet natural, style, sentiments worthy of the conqueror of the freest

freeſt people on earth, and that force and grandeur of character, and deep thought, which pervade the language of theſe laſt Romans, could not but be felt by ſpectators capable of diſcovering ſuch merit, and men whoſe hearts and minds were related to theſe great perſonages, as well as by thoſe who might love hiſtory, and ſuch young minds as in the courſe of education had lately been occupied by ſimilar objects.

Hiſtorical tragedies, ſuch as Cinna, the death of Pompey, Brutus, Rome Preſerved, and the Triumvirate, of Voltaire, cannot be equally intereſting with the Cid, Iphigene, Zaïre, or Merope.

The mild and tender paſſions cannot diſplay themſelves in conformity with hiſtorical fact; incidents cannot be ſo ſelected and diſpoſed as to produce theatrical effect with equal ſucceſs; the poet has not the ſame power over the characters; the general intereſt, which is that of a people, or of a ſtate rather than of an individual, is rendered leſs forcible, becauſe it is dependent on ſentiments leſs energetic.

But, far from ſtigmatiſing this ſpecies of writing, as the coldeſt and moſt unfavourable to dramatic genius, it ought to be encouraged, becauſe it opens a vaſt field for the poet, in which he may unfold

unfold all the ſublime truths of politics because it diſplays grand hiſtorical pictures, and because, by theſe means, the ſoul may moſt effectually be formed and elevated. We, doubtleſs, ought to place theſe among the firſt of poems which, like Mahomet and Alzire, are at once extenſive, and abounding with pathos and terror. But theſe are uncommon ſubjects, and require the exertion of talents, which no poet but Voltaire has hitherto poſſeſſed.

The Death of Cæſar was not allowed to be printed: the republican ſentiments it contained were attributed as crimes to the author. This was a ridiculous imputation;

Who could, at present, suppose that the eulogy on the death of Mademoiselle le Couvreur could have been made a subject of serious persecution, and have obliged Voltaire to quit the metropolis, where he knew that absence would fortunately

totally cause all things to be forgotten, and even the frenzy of perfecution

The theatre is truly a useful institution, as which even indolent and favourless youth preserve something of the habit of feeling and of thinking, while moral ideas are not totally loft to their minds, and the pleasures of the imagination are still felt to exist. The sensations which the representation of a tragedy excite purify the soul, and raise it from that apathy and egotism which are the maladies to which the dissipated are, in the nature of things, condemned. Such exhibitions form a kind of connection between the two classes of men who do,

and

and men who do not think. They ſoften the auſterity of the one; and, in the other, temper that want of feeling which is the child of thoughtleſſneſs and pride. It is a ſingular fatality that in a country, in which the dramatic art has been carried to the higheſt degree of perfection, the actors, to whom the public are indebted for the nobleſt of their pleaſures, ſhould be condemned by religion, and ſhunned from the moſt ridiculous of prejudices.

Theſe prejudices Voltaire hardily oppoſed. Indignant to behold an actreſs, who had long been the object of enthuſiaſtic applauſe, after being carried

off

off by a ſudden and cruel death, deprived of the rites of burial, becauſe in a ſtate of excommunication, he loudly reproached a frivolous nation which with cowardice bent the neck under ſo ſhameful a yoke, and the puſillanimity of thoſe people in power who peaceably ſuffered the memory of her whom they had ſo much admired to be thus inſulted. Though nations are ſlow to correct themſelves, they ſtill ſuffer themſelves to be told of their faults with patience. But the prieſts, whom the parliaments would ſuffer to excommunicate none but wizards and players, were irritated to ſee a poet dare to diſpute the half of their empire, and the people in power could

could not pardon him for having pre-
ferred the interdict.

Voltaire felt that some great theatri-
cal success could alone fortify him in the
hearts of the public, and shield him from
the attacks of fanaticism. In a country
in which no popular power exists, each
class has some point at which to
rally and forms itself into a species of
power. A dramatic author is under the
protection of those societies who resort
to the theatre for amusement. The
public, by applauding allusions, flatter
or offend the vanity of men in office,
discourage or re-animate their oppo-
nents, and cannot for this reason be openly

defied

dified. Voltaire, therefore, postponed his Eriphile, which did not suit his purpose; but, far from being discouraged by want of success, and delighted with the subject of Zaïre, he finished that tragedy in eight days, and it made its appearance on the stage four months after Eriphile.

Its success surpassed his hopes. This was the first piece in which, forsaking the tract of Corneille and Racine, he discovered an original style, and talents entirely his own. Never did love more true or more impassioned draw tears more sweet; never did poet before so depict the fury of jealousy in a mind so simple,

ſo affectionate, and ſo generous. We love Oroſmanes at the very moment he makes us ſhudder. He ſacrifices Zaïre, the affecting, the lovely, the virtuous Zaïre, yet we cannot hate him. And even, were it poſſible to forget Oroſmanes and Zaïre, how awful is impiety in the perſon of the aged Luſignan? How noble is the ſpirit of fanaticiſm, which the reproaches of Nereſtan breathe? With what art has the poet painted the Chriſtians whoſe interference diſturb ſo ſweet a union, a feeling and pious woman who has ſacrificed her life and her love to her God, while the man who believes not in Chriſtianity weeps for Zaïre, whoſe mind is diſtracted by

filial

filial affection, and who is the willing victim of a superstitious prejudice which forbids her to love a man of a different sect. This is the master-piece of art. Whoever does not believe in the Old Testament, discovers in Athalia nothing but the school of bigotry, falsehood, and murder; but to all sects, and in all countries, Zaïre is the tragedy of the feeling and the innocent heart.

This tragedy was followed by that of Adelaide de Guesclin, which had likewise love for its subject, and in which, as in Zaïre, French heroes and French history were recited in beauti-

ful poetry, so as to increase the interest. But it was the patriotism of a citizen who delighted in the recollection of respected names and great events, and not the *patriotism of the anti-chamber* which has since been so applauded on the French theatre.

Adelaide failed of success. A wit, when Marianne was acting, prevented it being heard to the end by calling from the pit, *The queen drinks.* Another accosted Adelaide to be condemned by answering *Coussi, coussi**, to the noble and affecting question of Vendome, *Es tu content Couci†?*

* So, so. † Art thou satisfied, Couci?

This

This ſame piece was again acted under the title of the Duke de Foix, after having been corrected, not in conformity to the judgment of the author but of his critics, and was more ſucceſsful. But when, long after, the philoſopher's three blows of the hammer had unknowingly taught the audience not to hiſs when the canon was fired* in Adelaide, at a time when the play was again acted in deſpight of Voltaire, who had leſs recollection of the beauties of his piece than of the wounds which cruſh

* The text is, *Lorſque les trois coups de marteau du philoſopher, ſans le ſavoir, eurent appris qu'on ne ſiffloit plus le coup de canon d' Adelaide, &c.* The tranſlator imagines there is an alluſion here to ſome (perhaps well known) paſſage or incident of which he cannot it his duty ingenuouſly to confeſs his ignorance.

cism had inflicted, it met with the most unbounded applause. The character of Vendome, as amorous as that of Orosmanes, was then felt in all its force. The one, jealous in consequence of an imperious temper, the other, from an excess of love; the first, tyrannical from native impetuosity and pride, and the second, from the unfortunate habits attending on despotic power. Tender and disinterested in his affection, Orosmanes renders himself guilty during that momentary frenzy into which he is hurried by excusable error, and punishes by sacrifing himself; Vendome, more personal and rather the slave of his passion than of his mistress,

protects his crime with a more tranquil fury, but expiates it by his remorſe and the ſacrifice of his love. The one exhibits thoſe exceſſes and ſufferings into which the violence of deſpair plunges the generous ſoul; and the other, the power of repentant virtue over the ſtrong mind, which had previouſly abandoned itſelf to paſſion.

It is ſaid that the ſucceſs of Adelaide was injured by the Temple of Taſte, in which charming work Voltaire had paſſed ſentence on the writers of the paſt age, and even on ſome of his cotemporaries. Time has confirmed all his deciſions, which each then appeared

ſacrilegious. In obſerving ſuch literary intolerance, the neceſſity under which every writer labours who wiſhes to live in peace, of reſpecting opinions already formed of the merit of an orator or a poet, and the fury with which the public purſues thoſe who dare even on the moſt indifferent ſubjects to think differently from themſelves, we ſhould be tempted to imagine that man is intolerant by Nature. Wit, reaſon, and genius cannot always guard us againſt this misfortune. There are few men who have not ſome ſecret idols, the worſhip of which they cannot calmly ſee deſtroyed.

Pride and envy is frequently the origin of this ſenſation. The writer who, criticiſing thoſe whom we admire, aſſumes an air of ſuperiority over them and conſequently over ourſelves, we regard as one that affects an offenſive pre-eminence. We fear, while pulling down the ſtatue of the man who is no more, he means to ſubſtitute that of a living favourite, whoſe fame fails not to afflict mediocrity. But when ſtrong minds yield to this kind of intolerance, this temporary and excuſable weakneſs, the offspring of indolence and habit, they ſoon again cede to the force of truth, and are neither guilty of injuſtice nor perſecution.

Voltaire had, in his retirement, conceived the happy plan of bringing his nation acquainted with the philoſophy, the literature, the opinions, and the ſects of England; to effect which, he wrote his Letters on the Engliſh Nation. Newton whoſe philoſophic opinions, whoſe ſyſtem of the earth, and whoſe optical experiments were ſcarcely known in France; Locke whoſe Eſſay on the Human Underſtanding, tranſlated into French, had only been read by a few philoſophers; Bacon the extent of whoſe fame was that he had been lord chancelor; Shakſpere whoſe genius and groſs errors form a phœnomenon in the hiſtory of literature; Congreve,

Congreve, Wicherly, Addiſon, and Pope whoſe names were almoſt unknown even by our men of letters; the bigotted Quakers who, without being perſecutors, were fanaticks in their devotion, yet the moſt rational of Chriſtians in their creed and in their morals, ridiculous in the eyes of the world, for having carried two virtues to excess, the love of peace and the love of equality; the other ſects by which England was divided; the influence which a general ſpirit of freedom had there obtained over literature, philoſophy, arts, opinions, and manners; and the practice of inoculation which had been examined without prejudice and met with

with few impediments, notwithstanding the singularity and the innovation of the practice: such were the principal subjects of his work.

Fontenelle was the first who made reason and philosophy speak an agreeable and inviting language: he had the art to mingle reflexions, sage, delicate, and frequently profound, with the sciences. In the Letters of Voltaire we discover the merit of Fontenelle, with more taste, simplicity, boldness, and gaiety. No rooted attachment to the errors of Des Cartes interfered, to spread a shade over, and to disfigure, truth. He possessed the lo-

gic

gic and pleasantry of the *Lettres Provinciales**, but exercised them on greater subjects; nor were they injured by a varnish of monkish devotion.

This work was the æra of a revolution in France; it gave rise to a taste for philosophy, and English literature; it interested us in the manners, policy, and commercial knowledge of that nation; and it brought us acquainted with the English language. A puerile partiality afterward took place of former indifference; and, by a remarkable singularity, Voltaire had the glory of combating it, and of diminishing its

* By Pascal.

influence.

influence. He had taught us to feel the merit of Shakspere, and to regard his works as a mine, whence treasures might be dug by our poets; and, when a ridiculous enthusiasm presented this eloquent, but wild and capricious poet, as a model to a nation possessed of Racine and Voltaire, and wished us to consider his canvass, overcharged with absurdity and gross caricature, as the energetic and true pictures of nature, Voltaire defended the cause of taste and reason. He had first exclaimed against the too great timidity of our theatre, and was afterward obliged to exclaim against our inclination to imitate

tate the licentious barbarity of the Engliſh ſtage.

The publication of theſe letters excited perſecution, the bitterneſs of which, to read them at preſent, could ſcarcely be conceived: but innate ideas were oppoſed in them, and our doctors of that day believed, if there were no innate ideas, there would be no ſufficiently marked characters to diſtinguiſh between the ſouls of men and of brutes. Beſide, it was there maintained, after Locke, that there was no ſtrict proof that God had not the power, if he had the will, to impart to matter the faculty of thinking. This was to infringe

on

on the privilege of the divines, who pretended to know accurately and exactly, they and they alone, all that God has thought, and all that he could do, or has done, ſince, and even before, the beginning of the world.

In fine, Voltaire criticiſed ſome paſſages of the Thoughts of Paſcal: a work which the Jeſuits, in their own deſpite, were obliged to reſpect as much as the works of St. Auguſtin. It gave ſcandalous offence to ſee a poet, nay more a layman, dare to ſit in judgment on Paſcal. It appeared to be an attack on the only defender of the Chriſtian religion, who, among the faſhionable

world,

world had the reputation of being a great man. It was to attack religion itſelf: and how much would the proofs of religion be weakened, ſhould the mathematician, Paſcal, who had openly devoted himſelf to its defence, be convicted of having often reaſoned ill.

The clergy demanded that the Letters on the Engliſh Nation ſhould be ſuppreſſed; and they were ſo, by an arret of council. Theſe arrets were given, without examination, as a kind of retribution, for the ſubſidy which government obtained from the aſſemblies of the clergy; and as a reward for the facility with which they were granted.

granted. Miniſters forgot that the intereſt of the ſecular power was not to ſupport, but to ſuffer the progreſs of reaſon to deſtroy, that empire of the prieſthood which has been ſo long and ſo barbarouſly abuſed; and that it is not good policy to purchaſe peace of an enemy, by ſacrificing our defenders.

The parliament burnt the book, according to a cuſtom formerly invented by Tiberius, and rendered ridiculous ſince the invention of printing. But there are certain people for whom the experience of three ages are neceſſary, before they can begin to perceive abſurdity.

So

So much perſecution, exerciſed at the very time when the miracles of the Abbé Paris and thoſe of Father Girard were acting, loaded the two perſecuting parties with ridicule and opprobrium. It was natural that they ſhould unite againſt a man who daringly preached reaſon; and they went ſo far as to order informations to be iſſued againſt the author of the Letters. The keeper of the ſeals baniſhed Voltaire, who, being at that time abſent, received early information, and avoided the people ſent to conduct him to the place of his exile; rather chooſing to combat at a diſtance, and where he could be in ſafety. His friends proved that he had

not forfeited his promise, not to publish his letters in France, and that they had made their appearance from the treachery of a book-binder. Fortunately, the keeper of the seals had more zeal for his authority than for religion, and was much more of a minister than of a devotee. The storm was hushed, and Voltaire had permission to return to Paris.

This calm was but of momentary duration. The epistle to Urania, which, till then, had been kept in secret, was printed; and Voltaire, to escape a new persecution, was obliged to disavow and attribute it to the Abbe

der Chaudieu, who had been dead several years. The imputation did the abbé honour as a poet, without injuring his fame as a Christian. To conceive, however, an injury on him, or to expose

The necessity of falsehood in disavowing a work, is an act of enormity alike repugnant to conscience and to dignity of character; but the crime is in the injustice of those men who render such a disavowal necessary for the safety of the author. If that which is in itself innocent be made a crime, if absurd or arbitrary laws have infringed on the natural right, which all men possess, of not only having but publishing their opinions, we then deservedly

lose the bother of right of property, by giving the birth which is solely founded on freedom. We are forbidden to deceive, because to deceive any man is to commit an injury on him, or to expose him to commit one himself. But injury supposes a right; and no one has the right to seek for and procure to himself the means of doing injustice.

We do not dispute Voltaire, for having attributed his work to the Abbé de Chaulieu, but such an imputation is in itself indifferent, and no mere act of pleasantry; it is affording an excuse to people in power who are disposed to be indulgent without daring to confess them-

themselves to, by the aid of which they may repel such persecutors as were officious in their zeal.

The indiscretion with which some of the friends of Voltaire repeated fragments from the Maid of Orleans, was the cause of a new persecution. The keeper of the seals threatened to confine the poet in the worst and deepest of dungeons, if any part of the poem made its appearance. Remembering the long space of time during which such subaltern tyranny, invested by momentary power, have dared to hold similar language to men who have been the glory of their country and

their age, the confusions of contempt, ridiculous and execrable; those of indignation. The oppreſſor and the oppreſſed are now both in the grave; but the name of the oppreſſed will be borne, on the wings of fame, to future ages, and ſingly preſerved from oblivion; while eternal ſhame will purſue the memory of his cowardly perſecutors.

It was in theſe tempeſtuous times that the lieutenant of the police, Herault, one day ſaid to Voltaire: "Write what you will, you never can overturn the Chriſtian religion."

"We shall see that," replied the poet.

At a time when there was much conversation concerning a man who had been arrested by a supposed forged lettre de cachet, Voltaire asked the same magistrate what punishment would be inflicted on those who should fabricate false lettres de cachet.—"They will be hanged."—"That will be but doing right: let us hope the time will come when those who sign the true will be served in the same way."

* See, in the general correspondence of D'Alembert, the letter of the 20th of June, 1760.

Wearied by so much persecution, Voltaire thought it necessary to change his mode of life, to effect which fortune seemed to him the means. Ancient philosophers have vaunted of poverty as the safeguard of independence: Voltaire, like them, might be independent, wished to become rich, and he was equally to be commended. The ancients were unacquainted with that spirit which may at once be dispersed and secured, in various countries, beyond the reach of power. Confiscation and its abuses amongst them rendered wealth as dangerous as fame, or popular favour. The extent of the Roman empire, and the small-



ness

nefs of the Grecian republics, which prevented men from the acquirement of their riches, or their perſons. The difference of manners among neighbouring nations, the almoſt general ignorance of foreign languages, and a leſs degree of intercourſe throughout the world, were then ſo many impediments to a change of country.

The ancients likewiſe knew leſs of the conveniencies of life, which among us are become neceſſary to all who are not born in poverty. Their climate ſubjected them to leſs numerous real wants, and the wealthy were more addicted to magnificence, refinement in

debauchery,

debauchery, excess, and caprice, than to habitual and daily convenience. Thus, as it was more easy for them to be poor, and more difficult to be rich without danger, riches were not among them, as among us, the means of escaping from unjust oppression.

Let us not blame a philosopher for having, in order to secure his independence, preferred such resources as the manners of his age supplied to those which belong to other manners and to other times.

The fortune which descended to Voltaire from his father, and his brother

their wants simple, and had been increased by the London edition of the Henriade, and fortunate speculations in the public funds. Thus, to the advantage of possessing wealth, which ascertained independence, he added that of being indebted for it to himself. The use he made of riches might prevail on envy itself to pardon him their acquirement.

Much of his wealth was expended in aiding men of letters, and in encouraging such youth as he thought discovered the seeds of genius. This, in particular, was the application he made of the trifling profits he derived from

from his world and his theatrical productions, when he did not make a free gift of the latter to the comedians. He never was author more cruelly derided or injuries done to his booksellers; but the whole swarm of literary insects were at their command, and were themselves anxious to decry the conduct of a man whose works they were conscious they could not bring into disrepute. The pride of mediocrity, the vanity of men, even of merit, wounded by a too intolerable superiority, the envy would ever anxious to degrade knowledge and talents which are the objects of their secret envy, and fanatics who were interested to

calum-

calumniate Voltaire, that they might have the less to fear, all conspired to increase the detraction of unpolished and hyper-critics. But proofs of the falsehood of these imputations, as well as the favours heaped by Voltaire on some of his detractors, still subsist; nor can we remember these proofs without a sigh, at the misfortune of genius thus condemned to suffer, and at that shameful facility men have to credit whatever can relieve them from the necessity of admiring. Such sights are the melancholy retributions of fame.

Having no more need, for the security of his fortune, to court patronage, solicit

folicit places, or to trafic with booksellers. Voltaire renounced all residence at the capital. Previous to the administration of Cardinal de Fleury, and his journey to England, his intercourse had been among people of the first fashion. Princes and nobles, those who were at the head of affairs, people of fashion and women most in vogue, were courted by him and were equally desirous of his company. He was every where received with pleasure and welcome, but he every where inspired envy and fear. Superior in genius, he was even more so, in the wit of conversation, into which he infused whatever can render frivolity amiable,

amiable, and at the same time imperfect traits of a more elevated mind. Born with the talent of humour, his repartees were often repeated, nor was there any want of an application of the word malignant to what was no more than the decision of the understanding rendered acute by native wit.

On his return from England, he felt that in society, where men assemble from motives of vanity and self-love, he should meet but with few friends. He therefore, though he did not quarrel with such societies, frequented them less. The taste he had acquired for magnificence, grandeur, and whatever

tinued

fingled passion of his old age; and I have still possessed M. d'Argental's wife, during his long life, preserved sensations of affection and admiration for Voltaire; and who was rewarded by his friendship and his confidence. Madame Forment and Madame Gidaville were likewise his friends, and the confidants of his works and his projects.

But about the time when he suffered such various persecution, friendship, still more tender, afforded him consolation and increased his love of retirement. The Marchioness du Chatelet was, like him, passionately enamoured of study and fame, as well as of philo-

sophy; a burgh was of that kind of philosophy, which springs up in the fertile and fine mind. She had studied metaphysics and geometry sufficiently to admire Leibnitz, and translated Newton. She cultivated the arts, but not enthusiastically, nor so as to prefer them to the knowledge of nature and man. Superior to prejudice, as well from strength of character as from reason, she had not the weakness to conceal her mind: prejudice was despised by her, willing, in the trifling amusements of her sex, rank, and age, she yet could occasionally abandon them without regret in favour of serious thought, labour, and friendship. Her

superiority excited the jealousy of vain men and even of some of those, with whom he necessarily associated. Yet he could pardon their envy, without an effort. Such was the friend, that Voltaire selected with whom to pass his days; days which were ever consecrated to works of genius, and embellished by mutual friendship.

Weary of literary disputes, disgusted to see the league which faction united had formed against him, and which was secretly supported by men whose talents should have preserved them from such unworthy associates, feeling likewise that since he had dared to speak truth

his accuſers were as numerous as his critics, and perceiving that they inceſſantly ſtretch religion and government againſt him becauſe he was a good poet, he ſought employment more peaceful in the ſtudy of the ſciences.

He determined to publiſh an elementary Treatiſe of the Diſcoveries of Newton, relative to the ſyſtem of the earth and of light, that he might render them familiar to all who had the ſlighteſt knowledge of mathematics; and that he might make known, at the ſame time, the philoſophic opinions of Newton, and his ideas of ancient chronology.

At the time that these Elements appeared, the Cartesian system prevailed even in the Academy of Sciences, at Paris. A few young geometricians only had the courage to forsake it; nor did any work exist in the French language from which an idea could be formed of the grand discoveries which had, for half a century, been rendered public in England.

The author, however, was refused a privilege for publication. The Chancellor d'Aguesseau was a Cartesian in his youth, because the system was then fashionable among such as pique themselves on rising superior to vulgar pre-

judice; and to these his philosophical opinions were added his political and religious sentiments against Newton. He discovered that a chancellor of France ought not to suffer an English philosopher, who scarcely was a Christian, to rise victorious over a supposed orthodox Frenchman. D'Agesseau had a prodigious memory, and continued study had rendered him deeply learned in various species of erudition; but his mind, wearied by being made the receptacle of the opinions of others, had neither strength sufficient to combine his own ideas, nor to form fixt and definite principles. His superstition, his timidity, his respect for an-

chine customs, and his mind of refined reformation of the laws and impeded his activity. He died, after having been long a minister, and left friends to regret that his great virtues had slumbered in inactivity, and that his rare qualities had been lost to the world.

His severity respecting the Elements of the Newtonian Philosophy was not the only mark of littleness he shewed during his censorship of the press. He would not give privileges for the printing of novels; nor would he suffer the novel of Cleveland to be published,

but on condition that the hero should change his religion.

Voltaire, at the same time, pursued the study of experimental philosophy, sent queries of every kind to the learned, and repeated their experiments, or made new ones in their stead.

He was a candidate for the prize, given by the Academy of Sciences, on the nature and propagation of fire; and assumed the following motto, which, for precision and energy, is not unworthy of the author of the Henriade:

*Ignis ubique latet naturam amplectitur omnem,*
*Cuncta parit, renovat, dividit, unit, alit.*

The prize was given to the illustrious Euler, by whom, in scientific contest, no man need blush at being vanquished. Madame du Chatelet, as well as her friend, was likewise a candidate, and both pieces were mentioned in very honourable terms.

The dispute on the measure of forces at that time occupied mathematicians. Voltaire, in a memorial presented to and approved by the Academy, took the part of Des Cartes and Newton against Leibnitz and the two Bernouilli's; nay even against Madame du Chatelet, who was become the partisan of Leibnitz.

We

We are far from pretending that these writings are any addition to the fame of Voltaire, or even that they deserve a place among the learned, but the merit of having made the French, who are not mathematicians, acquainted with Newton, the true system of the earth, and the principal phœnomena of optics, deserves notice in the life of a philosopher.

It is good to disseminate truth relative to objects of science, whether it relate to the great laws of nature and the order of the world, or to those common facts which fall under every man's observation. Absolute ignorance is

is ever accompanied by error; and error in physic often is the support of prejudices of a more dangerous kind. The philosophic knowledge of Voltaire was further useful to him as a poet. We do not, here, entirely refer to those pieces in which he had the rare merit of expressing truth in verse with precision without disfiguring it, or ceasing to be a poet, or of addressing the imagination while he delighted the ear. The study of the sciences enlarges the sphere of poetic ideas, and enriches verse with new images. Without this resource, poetry, necessarily limited by too confined a circle, would be no more than the art of re-producing,

in

in harmonious language, common thoughts and exhausted pictures.

Be the subject what it may, he who poſſeſſes extenſive and profound knowledge will ever poſſeſs an immenſe advantage. The poetic genius of Voltaire would have been the ſame, but he would not have been ſo great a poet, had he not ſtudied philoſophy and hiſtory. Nor is it ſolely in augmenting the number of our ideas that ſuch extraneous ſtudies are uſeful; they add to the perfection of the mind, by exerciſing its various faculties in a more equal manner.

After

After having applied some years to experimental philosophy, Voltaire consulted Clairaut relative to his progress, who had the frankness to answer that after obstinate labour he would never arise above mediocrity in the sciences, and that he would vainly lose that time which fame required he should dedicate to poetry and ethics. Voltaire listened patiently and yielded to that natural inclination which incessantly led him to the Belles Lettres and to the wishes of his friends, who were unable to accompany him in his new career.

He was not therefore entirely absorbed in the sciences during his resi-

dence

dence at Cirey. Hence were wrote Alzire, Zoïme, Mahomet, the Hiſtory of Charles XII. finiſhed his Diſcourſes on Man, prepared the Age of Louis XIV. and collected materials for his Eſſay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, from Charlemagne to the preſent age.

Alzire and Mahomet are immortal monuments of the height to which the human genius, poetry, and philoſophy can raiſe the tragic art. This art is not in theſe pieces confined to the pourtraying the paſſions, awakening their power over the ſoul, and making the ſweet tears of love and of pity flow; it becomes the tutor of mankind, whom it inclines to

virtue;

virtuous indolent citizen, who bring with them to the theatre the weariness of having spent a useless day, are there called on to discuss their first grand interests of the human race, and to that of humanity should become the

In Alzire, we behold the noble but wild and impetuous virtues of the man of nature, combatting the vices of society corrupted by fanaticism and ambition, and, ceding to virtue, made perfect by reason in the soul of Alzire, or in the dying and disabused Gusman. Here, we at once are taught how society corrupts man by making pleasure the substitute of ignorance, and how it

improves

But the most fatal of prejudices is that of fanaticism. Voltaire was determined the monster should become the victim of the stage; and, that he might expel it from every heart, he employed these terrible effects which tragedy alone can afford. It, no doubt, was easy to render a fanatic odious, but that this fanatic should be a great man, and that, while abhorring, we should of necessity admire him, that he should deserve no reproach without degradation, that, while occupied in propagating

gating a religion, and raising an empire, he should be in love without being ridiculous, that while committing every crime he should not inspire that painful horror which accompanies the acts of villains, that in the tone of a prophet he should speak the language of genius, that he should be superior to the bigotry with which he intoxicated his ignorant and intrepid disciples, yet be above the baseness of hypocrisy, that his crimes should be successful, that he should triumph, yet should appear sufficiently punished by remorse, all this could only be effected by the dramatic art, when employed by the true poet.

Mahomet was firſt acted at Lille, in 1741. During the repreſentation, a letter from the king of Pruſſia was delivered to Voltaire, which informed him of the victory of Molwitz. He ſtopped the piece to read the letter to the auditors. You will ſee, ſaid he, to his ſurrounding friends, this tragedy of Molwitz will make mine ſucceſsful. They ventured to play it at Paris; but the bigots, by their exclamations, availing themſelves of the weakneſs of the Cardinal de Fleury, prevailed on him to forbid the repreſentation. Voltaire thought proper to ſend it to Benedict XIV. with two Latin verſes for his portrait. The Pontiff, Lambertini, a tolerant

tolerant and eaſy prince, but a man of much underſtanding, ſent him a kind anſwer, accompanied by ſome medals.

Crébillon was more ſcrupulous than the pope. He never would conſent that a piece ſhould be played, which, by proving that tragic terror may be increaſed to the utmoſt exceſs without ſacrificing the pathos or revolting the mind, was a ſatire on that ſpecies of writing, of which he proudly believed himſelf to be the creator and the model. It was not till the year 1751 that M. D'Alembert, being appointed by M. D'Argenſon to examine Mahomet, had the courage to approve it, and

thus to expose himself to the mutual hatred of the men of letters leagued against Voltaire, and of the devotees. His fortitude was the more deserving of respect, because the applauder of a work does not participate in its fame, and because he could find no recompense for the danger to which he exposed himself, except the pleasure of having served his friend, and guided the triumph of reason.

Zelmire failed of success; nor were the efforts of the author to correct and palliate its faults effectual. A tragedy is an experiment on the human heart, and an experiment which does

not always succeed, even in the most able hands. Zaïra, however, is the first woman presented on the stage, who, hurried by passion into criminal acts, still preserved all the generosity and disinterestedness of love. This character, so natural, so violent, and so tender, might perhaps have deserved indulgence from the audience; and the critics of the theatre, in favour of the new beauties of this part, might have pardoned the weakness of the others, which the author himself condemned with equal frankness and severity.

The Discourses on Man are one of the finest monuments of French poetry.

The plan of them may not be so regular as that of the Epistles of Pope, but they possess the advantage of philosophy more true, mild, and general. All the variety of harmony, a kind of carelessness, soothing sensibility, an enthusiasm ever noble and ever real, impart a charm to them, which alternately delights the mind, the imagination, and the heart; a charm, the use of which was known only to Voltaire, and which was that of pleasing, moving, and instructing, without ever fatiguing the reader, and of writing to all understandings, and to all ages. Flashes of true philosophy frequently break forth, and are generally addressed

so

so to the feelings or to the fancy as to appear natural, and to become popular. This talent is as beneficial and as rare as that of giving a profound appearance to false and trivial ideas is common and dangerous.

Quitting the company of Pope, we admire his genius, and the address with which he defends his system; but the soul is unmoved, and the mind presently finds that its objections have rather been eluded than answered. But we cannot leave Voltaire without encouragement or consolation; and, while we have a melancholy prospect of the evils to which nature has con-

dernier rang, we are likewise acquainted with their anecdotes.

The Life of Charles XII. was the first of the historical publications of Voltaire. The ſtyle, as rapid as the exploits of the hero, hurries on the reader to an uninterrupted train of ſplendid expeditions, ſingular anecdotes, and romantic events, which give curioſity and feeling no reſpite. The narrative is rarely interrupted by reflections. The author forgot himſelf that he might give place to his characters. He ſeems to relate what he has juſt heard concerning his hero. The ſingle ſubject is battles and military enterprize; yet, the ſpirit of a

philoſopher

philosopher and the soul of all defenders of the human race are present every where.

Voltaire wrote from original memorials, furnished by those who were witnesses of the events; and his historical truth is warranted by the respectable testimony of Stanislaus, the friend, the companion, and the victim of Charles XII.

The history was, notwithstanding, accused of being a novel, because it had all the interest of one. Though no man, perhaps, ever excited so much enthusiasm, neither was any man ever

treated

treated with less indulgence than Voltaire. As a reputation for wit is in France the thing most envied, and as it was impossible for his superiority in wit to remain unacknowledged, he was most vehemently denied every other merit; and, the pretended claims to wit being as restless in every class of mankind as in that of men of letters, the number of those who envied him was almost equal to that of his readers.

In vain had Voltaire imagined that the retreat of Cirey would hide him from hatred; he had concealed his person only, his fame still offended his enemies. A libel, which was a malignant

nant attack on his whole life, appeared to the diſturbance of his repoſe. He was treated like a prince, or a miniſter, becauſe he excited equal envy. The Abbé Desfontaines, who was indebted to Voltaire for liberty, and perhaps for life, was the author of this libel. Accuſed of a ſhameful vice, which ſuperſtition has claſſed among crimes, he had been impriſoned at a time when, from atrocious and ridiculous policy, it was thought proper to burn a few men, in order to make another man conceive diſguſt for this vice, to which they falſely ſuppoſed him inclined.

Voltaire, being informed of the misfortune of the Abbé Desfontaines, who was personally unknown to him, and whose only recommendation was that he was a man of letters, hastened to Fontainbleau in search of Madame de Prie, then all puissant, from whom he obtained the prisoner's liberty, on condition that he should not appear at Paris. Voltaire further procured him a place of retirement at the seat of a lady of his acquaintance. Here Desfontaines wrote a libel against his benefactor; this he was obliged to throw into the fire, but he never could pardon Voltaire the act of saving his life. He eagerly took every opportunity the periodical

periodical publications afforded, of attacking him; and it was he who, by the mouth of a priest *, informed the world that Voltaire was the author of *Le Mondain*, an ingenious poem, the intent of which was to shew, that luxury, by polishing human manners and encouraging industry, obviates a part of those ills which take birth in the inequality of, and insensibility attendant on, riches.

He was thus exposed to the danger of new banishment, because, to the reproach of having preached up pleasure, a great one in the eyes of those who

* *Prêtre de séminaire.*

need

need the cloak of auſterity to conceal vice more real, was added the additional crime of having ridiculed the amuſements of our firſt parents.

In fine, the journaliſts publiſhed the *Voltaironnaie*; and then it was that Voltaire, who ſo long had ſilently ſuffered under the ſlanders of Desfontaines and Rouſſeau, abandoned himſelf to emotions of anger, of which his enemies were little worthy.

Not ſatisfied with avenging himſelf by delivering up his adverſaries to public contempt, and imprinting on them marks which no time can efface, he

he profecuted Desfontaines who escaped by disavowing the libel, and who immediately wrote others to console himself for the misfortune. Thus, at the age of forty-four, after having been patient during twenty years, Voltaire, for the first time, forgot that moderation which it were highly to be wished men of letters never should forget. Though they have received from nature the formidable gift of devoting their foes to ridicule and shame, they ought to disdain the use of this dangerous weapon in avenging their own quarrels, and employ it only against the persecutors of truth, and the enemies of the rights of mankind.

The

The friendship which about the same time was formed between Voltaire and the prince royal of Prussia, was one of the first causes of the excessive anger of his enemies. The young Frederic had received from his father the education of a soldier only, but nature formed him for a man of an amiable, extensive, and elevated mind, as well as for a great general. He was sent to Rhinesberg by his father, who, having conceived the project of beheading him as a deserter because he had attempted to travel without permission, yielded to the remonstrances of the imperial embassador, and satisfied himself with causing the prince to

be

In this state of seclusion was Frederic, who was enamoured with the French language, poetry, and philosophy, those Voltaire for his confident and guide. They mutually sent each other their works; the prince consulted the philosopher concerning his studies, and requested lessons and advice. They discussed the most curious as the most difficult metaphysical questions. The prince, at that time, studied the works of Wolf, whose systems and unintelligible language he soon abjured for philosophy more simple and more true.

[illegible] of Machiavel [illegible] that the moſt certain policy of a ſovereign is [illegible] that this perfidious deſire does not neceſſarily [illegible] of his ſubjects and his neighbours, as Machiavel had ſuppoſed, either from a love of hypotheſis or to diſguſt his countrymen with a monarchial government, toward which they ſeemed to be inclined by their wearineſs of a republican ſyſtem ever tempeſtuous and often cruel.

In the preceding century, Tycho-Brahe, Des Cartes, and Leibnitz, had enjoyed the ſociety of monarchs, by whom

perſiſt. He ſent his friend, the Baron de Keyſerling, to viſit the *Deities* of Ferney, and to obtain his portrait and manuſcripts for Voltaire. The philoſopher was moved, perhaps diſtreſſed, by this homage; but his greateſt pleaſure was the proſpect of a printing preſs to reign, without diviſion, over the friends of philoſophy and the foes of ſuperſtition. He hoped that the labours of this Anti-Machiavel would ſoon be a public

monarchy, and he took serious delight in secretly printing the book which he believed must bind the prince to virtue from the fear of betraying his own principles, and of reading his condemnation in the work he himself had written.

When Frederic ascended the throne, he relished no change; he remained the friend of Voltaire. The cares of government did not enfeeble his love of poetry, nor his avidity to possess the unpublished writings of Voltaire, which were read by scarcely any except himself and Madame du Chatelet. Yet, one of his first steps was to suspend the



publication,

publications of the Anti-Machiavel. Voltaire obeyed, and the corrections which he had made with regret were rendered fruitless.

His desire that his disciple, now a king, should enter into a public engagement, which should secure his adherence to philosophic maxims, was increased. He went to meet him at Wezel, and was astonished to see a young monarch in a uniform, on a camp-bed, shivering with a fever. But his fever did not prevent him from profiting by his neighbourhood to the principality of Liege, and enforcing the payment of a forgotten debt, from

The cardinal de Fleury died. Voltaire had been intimate with him, because he was desirous of learning the anecdotes of the reign of Louis XIV; and Fleury, who loved to relate them, dwelt on those which regarded himself, not doubting that Voltaire would eagerly insert them in his history.

But the hatred of Fleury, and of all feeble men, for one who rose superior to common powers, was greater than his love of raiſe, and even than his vanity.

Fleury endeavoured to impede freedom of ſpeech, and even of thought, in France, that he might govern with the greater eaſe. During his whole life, he had maintained a warfare of opinions in the kingdom, by his very endeavours to ſmother thoſe opinions, and prevent them from troubling the public repoſe. He was terrified by the daringneſs of Voltaire; equally afraid of expoſing himſelf, ſhould he defend

the

Voltaire was designed to be his successor in the French academy: he had lately acquired new claims which must have silenced envy, had she been capable of a blush. He had enriched the stage by another master-piece: by Merope, the only tragedy in which tears freely and sweetly flow, without the aid of the misfortunes of love. The

author

author of Zaïre had before applied the mixing of love,

*De cette paſſion la ſenſible peinture*
*Eſt, pour aller au cœur, la route, la plus ſure.**

He had affirmed that nature was capable of producing more feeling and more heart-rending effects on the ſtage; and in Merope, he proved his aſſertion.

If however Boileau, by *ſureſt*, underſtood the *leaſt difficult*, facts are in his favour. Various poets have written affecting tragedies founded on love; Merope ſtands alone.

* A pathetic picture of love, is the ſureſt road to the heart.

Hurried

Hurried on by the intereſt of the ſituations, a rapidity of dialogue till then unknown to the ſtage, and by the talent of an actreſs who had caught the empaſſioned tones of nature, the pit was agitated with unexampled enthuſiaſm. Voltaire, who was concealed in a corner of the houſe, was obliged to appear before the ſpectators. He came into the box of the lady of Marſhal de Villars. The houſe called on the young ducheſs of Villars to kiſs the author of Merope; and ſhe was under the neceſſity of obeying the imperious will of the public, intoxicated with admiration and pleaſure.

This

To this new claim, which even devotion was obliged to respect, was added the support of Madame de Chateauroux, then governed by the Duke de Richelieu, an extraordinary man, who, at the age of twenty, had twice been in the Bastile, for the rashness of his gallantries; who, by the rumour

and

to pleasure, but the vanity of seduction. This same man afterward contributed to the fame of the victory of Fontenoy, supported the revolution of Genoa, took part Minorca, and obliged an English army to lay down its arms; and when that army had broken the treaty, when it threatened his dispersed and feeble quarters, he stopped its progress by his activity and boldness.

After

The duke de Richelieu had from his infancy been the friend of Voltaire; and, though Voltaire had often cause of complaint against him, yet he preserved that remembrance of youthful affection which time cannot eradicate, and a kind of confidence which was rather maintained by habit than by conviction. The duke continued faithful to his old friend, as much as the levity of his character, his caprice, his petty

poetry, despotism at the theatres, his contempt for every man who was not a courtier, his weakness toward people in power, and his insensibility for all that was noble, or useful, would permit.

At this period he promoted the interest of Voltaire with Madame de Châteauroux. But M. de Maurepas did not love Voltaire. The Abbé de Chaulieu had written an epigram against Oedipus, because he was offended to see a young man, who had become his rival in fugitive poetry into which philosophy and voluptuousness were infused, acquire the additional fame of succeed-

ſucceeding at the theatre; and M. de Maurepas, whoſe vanity was to be the man of moſt wit at table, could not pardon Voltaire for ſo evidently robbing him of this advantage, with which it was not too ridiculous, at that time, for a miniſter of ſtate to be flattered.

Voltaire attempted to diſarm his anger by an epiſtle, in which he beſtowed ſuch praiſe as might appear moſt natural to the mind and character of M. de Maurepas. This epiſtle, which contained as much inſtruction as eulogium, effected no change in the ſentiments of the miniſter; who, that he might prevent Voltaire from gaining

a place in the academy, combined with the prieſt Boyer, whom Fleury had preferred, as the tutor of the dauphin, to Maſſillon, whoſe talents and virtue he feared; and which Boyer he, on his death-bed, recommended to the king to the charge of beſtowing eccleſiaſtical benefices, apparently from the hope that his memory might be regretted by the Janſeniſts. M. de Maurepas was likewiſe glad to have an opportunity of ſecretly counteracting Madame de Châteauroux, with whoſe hatred for him he was well acquainted. Voltaire, being informed of his intention, went to him and aſked, if Madame de Châteauroux ſhould ſupport

him

him in the election, whether he would oppoſe him. I will, anſwered the miniſter, and *will cruſh you**.

* In order to be juſt, it is here neceſſary to relate that having, after the death of Voltaire, mentioned this anecdote to the count de Maurepas, to whoſe character ſuch an anſwer does not ſeem natural, he, laughing, anſwered that it was the king himſelf who would not ſuffer Voltaire to ſucceed the Cardinal de Fleury, in his place of academician. His majeſty thought there was too marked a diſtance, between the men, to put the eulogium of the one, in the mouth of the other, and afford laughter to the public by ſuch an aſſociation.

M. de Maurepas further added, that he had long known Voltaire had written the anecdote of *I will cruſh you*. But this trifling act of injuſtice, from a man ſo celebrated, had not prevented him from ſoliciting and obtaining leave, from the preſent king, that the poet, who had been ſo great an honour to his age and nation, might return to Paris, at the cloſe of his life, there to enjoy the fruits of his fame.

*This is the note of the general correſpondent of the literary typographical ſociety.*

He knew how eaſy this would be to a miniſter; and that, under a feeble government, the influence of a miſtreſs muſt yield to that of intriguing fanatic prieſts, who were more deſpicable than a proſtitute, in the eyes of reaſon, though more reſpected by the populace. Boyer was triumphant.

The miniſter ſoon after perceived how neceſſary the alliance of the king of Pruſſia was to France. But this monarch feared to engage anew with a power whoſe timid and wavering policy could not inſpire confidence. Voltaire, it was ſuppoſed, might induce him to change his opinion, and was ſecretly

ſecretly charged with this negotiation. It was agreed that the perſecution of Boyer ſhould be the pretext of his journey into Pruſſia. He thus obtained the liberty to ridicule the poor prieſt, who went to complain to the king that Voltaire made him appear a fool in foreign courts. The king anſwered—"It was a ſettled point."

Voltaire departed, and Piron, at the head of his enemies, wrote abundance of epigrams and ſongs on his pretended diſgrace. Piron was in the habit of inſulting all celebrated men who underwent perſecution. His works abound with proofs of this mean ma-

lice; yet he had the character of a good natured man, because he was indolent; and, not having any native dignity of mind, he did not offend the vanity of others.

After having passed some time with the King of Prussia, who constantly refused all negociation with France, Voltaire had the address to divine the true motive of his refusal. It was the weakness that France had persisted in not to declare war against the English, and by this conduct to appear to entreat for peace, when she had a right to dictate its conditions.

He

He returned to Paris and gave an account of his journey. The following spring the King of Prussia again declared war against the Queen of Hungary, by which useful diversion he obliged her troops to evacuate Alsatia. This important service, with that of having penetrated, as he passed through the Hague, into the views of the Dutch who apparently were in a state of uncertainty, did not procure Voltaire any of those marks of respect from which he wished to raise a rampart against his literary enemies.

The Marquis D'Argenson was called to the ministry. He was a man

who deserves to be ranked among those few people in power who have really loved philosophy, and the public good. His taste for literature had connected him with Voltaire, whom he more than once employed to write manifestos, declarations, and dispatches, the style of which was required to be correct, dignified, and well adapted.

Such was the manifesto which was to have been published by the Pretender, on his descent into Scotland with a small French army, which the Duke de Richelieu was to have commanded. Voltaire had then an opportunity of labouring in conjunction with Count Lally,

Lally, a zealous Jacobite, and the determined enemy of the Engliſh; whoſe memory Voltaire afterward defended with ſo much fortitude when an unjuſt ſentence, executed with barbarity, ſacrificed him to the reſentment of ſome of the ſervants of the Eaſt India Company.

But he had, at the ſame time, a ſupport more potent in the Marchioneſs de Pompadour, with whom he had been intimate while her name was d'Etiole. She committed the writing of a piece to him, for the firſt marriage of the Dauphin. The place of gentleman of the chamber, the title of hiſtoriographer

toriographer of France, and in fine the protection of the court, which was neceſſary to oppoſe the faction of devotees who excluded him the French academy, were the recompenſe he received. It was on this occaſion that he wrote the following verſes:

*Mon Henri quatre et ma Zaïre,*
*Et mon Américaine Alzire,*
*Ne m'ont valu jamais un ſeul regard du Roi;*
*J'eus beaucoup d'ennemis, avec très-peu de gloire;*
*Les honneurs et les biens pleuvent enfin ſur moi,*
*Pour une farce de la foire*[*].

This was paſſing rather too ſevere a judgment on the Princeſs of Navarre,

[*] The Henriade, Zaïre, and my American Alzire never obtained me a look from majeſty; I had many enemies and little fame; but honours at length are ſhowered on me, for having written a farce,

which

which is a work full of noble and affecting gallantry.

The favour of the court however was insufficient to open the doors of the academy. He was obliged, in order to disarm the devotees, to write a letter to Father la Tour, in which he made protestation of his respect for religion, and, which was more necessary, of his attachment to the Jesuits. In despight of the address with which he manages his language in that letter, it were better he had renounced the academy than have had the weakness to write it. This weakness would have been inexcusable had it been the sacrifice of vanity,

in

in order to obtain a title which had long been incapable of adding honour to the name of Voltaire. But he supposed it his shield; he imagined he should find support against persecution from the academy. He presumed too favourably of the fortitude and justice of his associates.

In his discourse to the academy, he first threw off the yoke of custom, by which these discourses seemed rather condemned to be a string of compliments than of true praise. Voltaire boldly spoke of literature and of taste, and his example is in some manner become a law, against which the academicians,

micians, who are men of letters, rarely venture to err. But he did not go so far as to suppress their reiterated praises of Richelieu, Séguier, and Louis XIV. which has hitherto been done only by two or three of the boldest academicians. He mentioned Crébillon, in his discourses, with the noble generosity of a man who fears not to honour the talents of a rival, or to afford arms to his own antagonists.

A new torrent of libels was poured upon him, which he had not the fortitude to despise. The police was, at that time, committed to a man who had passed some months in the country with

Madame

Madame de Pompadour. A wretched muſician, of the opera band, was arreſted, whoſe name was Travenol, and and who, with the advocate Rigoley de Juvigny, privately ſold theſe libels. The father of Travenol, an old man of eighty, went to Voltaire, and demanded pardon for his guilty ſon; and the anger of the poet was huſhed by the firſt cry of humanity. He wept with, embraced, and conſoled the old man; and haſtened away with him, to obtain the liberty of his ſon.

Voltaire was not long in favour. Madame de Pompadour cauſed thoſe honours to be conferred on Crébillon,

which

which he had been refuſed. Voltaire had conſtantly done juſtice to the author of Rhadamiſtus, but he could not be ſo humble as to ſuppoſe him ſuperior to the author of Alzire, Mahomet, and Merope. In ſuch exaggerated enthuſiaſm for Crébillon, he diſcovered nothing but a ſecret deſire that he himſelf ſhould be humbled: nor was he deceived.

The wit and the poet might have preſerved powerful friends; but theſe titles in Voltaire concealed a philoſopher, a man more earneſt for the progreſs of reaſon, than the acquirement of perſonal fame.

His

His character, naturally proud and independent, yielded to ingenious adulation; he was prodigal of praise, but he preserved his feelings and his opinions, and the freedom of discovering them. Strong or affecting lessons rose out of panegyric; but that manner of praising which might succeed at the court of Frederic, could not but offend at any other court.

He therefore returned to Cirey, and soon afterwards to the court of Stanislaus. This prince, twice elected king of Poland, once by the will of Charles XII. and once by the desire of the nation, never possessed more than

the

the title of sovereign. Having united into Hennegau without this title, he should repair[illegible] by his beneficent acts those ills which the French administration had committed during the paternal government of Leopold confided a reign of devastation and misfortune. His devotion had neither stopped him of the love of pleasure nor of an affection for men of wit. His manners should be those of a wealthy private person; his manners those of native candour; of a man who had never been unhappy, except because others had determined to make him a king, nor ever dazzled by a title, from which he had derived nothing but danger. He wished to see

Madame du Chatelet and Voltaire at his court, or rather living as his inmates. The author of the seasons*, the only French poet, who like Voltaire has united philosophy and wit, then lived at Lunerville, where he was only known as an amiable young officer; but his first poetical productions, full of reason, wit, and taste, even then betoken a mind born to be an honour to his age.

At Lunerville, where Voltaire lived a life of occupation and mild tranquillity, he had the misfortune to lose his friend Madame du Chatelet died,

* St. Lambert.

at

at the moment when he had finished her translation of Newton, the labour of which had shortened her days. King Stanislaus went to console and weep with Voltaire in his chamber.

Having returned to Paris, the poet betook himself to his labours, a means of dissipating grief, which nature has imparted but to few. Such a power over our thoughts, and such force of mind, which affliction cannot vanquish, are precious gifts, which must not be depreciated by confounding them with want of feeling. Sensibility is not weakness; it is a capability of grief, without being overwhelmed by it: the

soul is not the less affectionate, nor has sorrow been less sincere, because opposed with fortitude; or because conquered by extraordinary powers.

Voltaire was weary of hearing the fashionable world, and most men of letters, prefer Crébillon to himself; which they did less from opinion than to punish him for the universality of his talents. Men are ever more indulgent to circumscribed genius, which exerted on one object appears to be a kind of instinct, because it offends not so many species of self-love, and humbles their pride less.

This

This opinion of the superiority of Crébillon was maintained with so much passion, that, in the preliminary discourse to the Encyclopedia, M. D'Alembert had need of fortitude to grant equality to the author of Alzire and Merope, and durst not extend justice further. Voltaire at length determined to avenge himself, and oblige the public to give him his true rank, by writing Semiramis, Oreftes, and Rome Preserved; which three subjects had before been treated by Crébillon. Every cabal that had been formed against Voltaire had united, to obtain momentary success for the Catiline of his rival; a piece, the conduct of which is absurd and the

style somewhat like that in which Cicero pro-
poses what he thought would seduce
Catiline, and induce high priest appoints a
rendezvous for the lovers in a temple,
where the ingredients for a certain kind
of sacrifice are to be found, and after
some time as impious, because it there dis-
appears from affairs.

On the contrary, Rome Presented is
the masterpiece of style, and of reason,
in which Cicero appears with all his dig-
nity and eloquence; in which Cæsar
speaks and acts like a man born to
reduce Rome to subjection, to over-
whelm his opponents by his glory, and
obtain pardon for tyranny by the force

of his talents and virtues; and in which Cataline is a villain, but one who endeavours to excuse his vices from example, and his crimes from neceſſity. Republican energy and Roman feelings entirely poſſeſs the poet.

Voltaire had a ſmall theatre on which he acted his pieces, and where he often played the part of Cicero. Never, it is ſaid, was illuſion more complete: while he recited he appeared to create his character; and when, in the fifth act, Cicero again appeared before the ſenate, when he excuſed his love of fame by reciting the following beautiful lines:

*Romains, j'aime la gloire, et vous prie m'en croire;*
*Des travaux des humains c'est le digne salaire,*
*Sénat, en vous servant il la faut acheter:*
*Qui n'ose la vouloir, n'ose la mériter* *.

the character and the poet were one, and the auditor imagined he heard Cicero, or Voltaire, avow and excuse this weakness of great minds.

There is only one good part in the Electra of Crébillon, and this is a subaltern character. Orestes, who knows not that he is Orestes, is in love with the daughter of Ægysthus, who has the

* Romans, I frankly own my thirst for fame,
The rich reward of peril, pain, and care;
Most nobly purchas'd in our country's cause!
Who dare not hope for, cannot merit fame.

misfortune to be called Iphigenia.

The implacable Electra is enamoured with the son of Ægysthus, and these insipid amours occupy the scene, whilst the furies are leading a bewildered son to the commission of parricide; being condemned by the gods to take this horrible revenge.

Voltaire felt that Clytemnestra should be rendered interesting by her remorse, by being characterised as rather feeble than guilty, and overawed by the cruel Ægysthus, but ashamed of having loved him, and sensible of the weight of her chains and of her crimes. If we compare this with the other tragedies of

Voltaire,

Voltaire, we shall, no doubt, find it much inferior to his best works; but if we contrast it with Sophocles, whom he meant to follow, that he might teach the French the characters and tragic conceptions of that poet, we shall perceive he had the art to preserve his beauties, imitate his style, correct his defects, and render Clytemnestra more pathetic, and Electra less barbarous. For which reason, when, in despite of cabal, the permanent beauties of the Greek poet were transmitted to the French stage, by a man worthy of becoming the interpreter of the most eloquent of the ancient tragic writers, and there enfants applause, Voltaire,

more

that

that she might reign herself, interesting,
it was necessary that the splendour of
her reign, her conquests, her victories,
and the extent of her empire should
force respect, and seize on the mind
of the spectators; that the criminal
queen should be the mistress of the
world, and possess the virtues of a great
monarch. The fact that, while exhibit-
ing the prodigies of a foreign religion
on the stage, it would be necessary, by
its magnificence and elevated and reli-
gious style, not to suffer the imagina-
tion to cool, to make the gods interfere
on all occasions, and to conceal the
absurdity of a miracle by indefatigably
presenting the consolatory idea of a

Divine

Divine Power, exercising a slow but inevitable vengeance on the secret crimes of kings.

Love, offensive in Orestes, was necessary in Semiramis. Ninyas must have a mistress, that he might feel a tenderness for Semiramis, be sensible of her kindness, and that she might fascinate him by her charms before he knew her to be his mother; otherwise the horror which incest inspires would have been injurious to that character which was to interest the audience. The style of Semiramis, the majesty of the subject, the pomp of the exhibition, and the peculiar pathos of some of the

scenes,

reenes, were triumphant over envy and faction. But it was long before equal justice was rendered to Oreſtes, and Rome Preſerved.

Complete juſtice, perhaps, has not yet been done, nor can we be ſurprized at this, when we recollect that all colleges and all the houſes in which the teachers of youth are themſelves educated are devoted to fanaticiſm, and that children in general are educated in prejudices againſt Voltaire.

Theſe three pieces he wrote at Seeaux, the ſeat of the Ducheſs du Maine, who delighted in poetry, gallantry,

lantry, and the arts; and who, in her palace, presented a picture of those ingenuous and splendid pleasures which had embellished the court of Lewis the XIVth, and dignified his follies. She delighted in Cicero, and prevailed on Voltaire to write his Rome. Prefered to avenge the outrage committed on the orator by Crébillon. Mahomet was sent to the pope, and Semiramis dedicated to a cardinal. He took a secret pleasure in convincing the French fanatics that the ecclesiastical princes knew how to combine the love of genius with religious zeal, and that they did not think they promoted Christianity by treating these men as its ene-

ed his ſervices, had endeavoured to gain their affection by praiſing them and taken every opportunity of winning the friendſhip of thoſe whom ſelf-love had rendered unjuſt.

The prieſts, who forgot not the Letters on the Engliſh Nation and Mahomet, while they were waiting occaſion to perſecute him, endeavoured to decry him and his works, and employed their whole aſcendancy over youth againſt him, eſpecially that which, as ſpiritual directors, they preſerved over private families and the devotees of the court. Abſolute ſilence only could preſerve him from calumny. He could pub-

lish no work without being certain that malignity would endeavour thence to accuse him of being impious, or to render him suspected by government. Madame de Pompadour, elevated to a situation in which she wished to be surrounded by none but slaves, forgot their former intimacy. She could not pardon his not having suffered with sufficient patience the preference granted to Crebillon. Louis the XVth had a kind of dislike to Voltaire, although he had flattered that prince to the injury of his own fame: but kings are, by habit, rendered almost insensible to public adulation; the artful praise of the courtiers, who, seizing

every

every trifling occaſion, repeat their panegyric continually and at the ſubtleſt moments, is alone ſeducing. This flattery conſiſts leſs in direct praiſe, than in an adroit approbation of the paſſions, inclinations, acts, and ſentiments of the monarch; half a word, a motion, a general maxim which excuſes their follies or their faults, produce greater effects than poetry which is worthy of poſterity. The eulogies of genius ſoothe only thoſe kings who have an actual love of fame.

It is ſaid that Voltaire, approaching Louis XV. after the repreſentation of the Temple of Fame, in which

Trajan after his victories accords peace to the world, and receives the crown which had been refused to conquerors and reserved for the man who was the friend of humanity, thus addressed the monarch—*Trajan est-il content* *? and that the king was less flattered by the comparison than offended by the familiarity.

M. d'Argenson refused to support Voltaire as a candidate for the title of Free Associate of the Academy of Sciences, and for obtaining a seat in the Academy of Belles Lettres, of which places he was at that time ambitious, as

* Is Trajan satisfied?

a refuge againſt the army of periodical critics who were obliged by the police to treat literary bodies with reſpect, except when other bodies or powerful individuals thought it their intereſt to humble them by abandoning them to the attacks of theſe contemptible enemies.

Voltaire, therefore, went to Berlin, and the very monarch, who had diſdained him, and the court, in which he had been treated with diſreſpect, were offended at his departure. The loſs of a man who honoured France, and the diſgrace of having obliged him to ſeek an aſylum in another country,

verſation only remembered. In the palace of the king of Pruſſia, he found peace and even the ſemblance of freedom; feeling at firſt no kind of ſubjection, except that of paſſing ſome hours with the king to correct his works, and to teach him the art of writing. He uſually ſupped with his majeſty; and theſe ſuppers, at which there was freedom in exceſs, where every queſtion of metaphyſics and morals was diſcuſſed without reſtraint, where the moſt unbounded pleaſantry enlivened, or cut ſerious argument ſhort, and where the king generally diſappeared to give place to the man of wit, were moments of agreeable relaxtion to Voltaire. The

remainder of his time was conſecrated to ſtudy.

Here he improved ſome of his tragedies, finiſhed his Age of Louis the XIVth, corrected his poem of the the Maid of Orleans, wrote part of his Eſſay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, and compoſed the poem on Natural Law; while Frederic governed his ſtates without a miniſter, inſpected and improved his army, compoſed poetry and muſic, and wrote philoſophy and hiſtory.

The royal family encouraged Voltaire in his purſuits; he addreſſed

verſes to the princeſſes, acted tragedy with the brothers and ſiſters of the king, and, while he taught them to declaim, led them to feel the beauties of French poetry; for poetry ought to be ſpoken aloud; nor can it be underſtood, in a foreign tongue, by thoſe who are not in the habit of hearing it recited by ſpeakers, who can give it that accent and force which are its characteriſtics.

This, Voltaire called the palace of Alcina; but the enchantment was of too ſhort duration. The men of literature, who had been longer at Berlin than himſelf, were jealous of preference

ence which was too conſpicuous, eſpecially of that kind of independence which he preſerved, that familiarity which the charms and brilliancy of his wit gave him, and that art of mingling truth with panegyric and of imparting to flattery the tone of jocular eaſe.

La Métrie told Voltaire that the king, to whom he was one day mentioning thoſe marks of kindneſs he diſcovered for his chamberlain, replied, "I want him at preſent to reviſe my works; but having ſucked the orange, we throw away the rind." When Voltaire heard this, the encantation was over; and his mind felt that kind of

ſuſpicion

ſuſpicion which never ſuffered him to loſe ſight of his project for eſcaping.

In the mean time the king was informed that Voltaire, being preſſed by general Manſtein to reviſe his memoirs, had anſwered, "The king has ſent me his dirty linen to waſh, yours muſt wait;" and that, another time, he had ſaid in a fit of ill humour, pointing to ſome poetical papers of the king, lying on the table, "That man is Cæſar and the Abbé Cottin."

Mutual inclination, however, acted on the monarch and the philoſopher. Frederic ſaid, long after their ſeparation,

tion, that he had never met with ſo amiable a man as Voltaire; and Voltaire, notwithſtanding his reſentment which never was entirely effaced, confeſſed, that when Frederic thought proper, he was the moſt pleaſing of mankind. They likewiſe united in their open contempt for prejudice and ſuperſtition; the pleaſure they took in making them the eternal objects of their jeſts, their common love for that philoſophy which is chearful and inviting, and their mutual diſpoſition to ſearch and to ſeize on the ridiculous in whatever pretended to ſuperior gravity, were the ſame. Hence it ſhould have ſeemed that the ſtorm muſt have

ended

ended in a calm, and that interest and pleasure must have continued them in friendship; but the jealousy of Maupertuis rendered them irreconcilable.

Maupertuis, a man of much wit, but not of too much learning, and of still less philosophy, was tormented by that desire of fame which makes us chuse trifling means when the great are wanting, utter paradoxes when we are unable to discover truths, generalise formula when we cannot invent them, and accumulate incongruities when we are deficient in new ideas. In Paris, he had been seen to leave the company, or hide himself behind a screen,

a ſcreen, when he could not continue the principal ſpeaker; and in like manner at Berlin, whether at the academy of ſciences or the table of the king, he would be the firſt. He was indebted to Voltaire for a great part of his reputation, as well as for the honour of being perpetual preſident of the academy of Berlin, and of exerciſing authority there in his majeſty's name.

Some jeſts which Voltaire had indulged in, when Maupertuis, following the king to the army, was taken priſoner at the battle of Molwitz, had angered him, and he vented his complaints with ill humour. Voltaire returned

turned a friendly anfwer, and appeafed him by writing four lines for his portrait. Maupertuis, fome years afterward, took it much amifs that Voltaire had not mentioned him in his difcourfe when elected to the French academy; and the arrival of Voltaire at Berlin completed his difguft. He faw him the friend of the fovereign, in whofe prefence he himfelf was but a courtier; and beheld him giving leffons to the man from whom he received orders.

Surrounded by enemies, and diffident of the continuance of royal friendfhip, Voltaire fecretly regretted, and endea-

endeavoured to recover, his loſt independence. He thought proper to employ a jew to transfer a part of his property out of Pruſſia. The jew betrayed his truſt; and, to revenge himſelf on Voltaire, who, having detected him, would not ſuffer himſelf to be robbed, he brought an abſurd action, knowing that hatred is not difficult in admitting evidence. The king, to puniſh his *friend* for having attempted to preſerve his liberty and property, pretended to believe him guilty, to deliver him up to juſtice, and even to exclude him his preſence till the cauſe ſhould be determined.

Voltaire

Voltaire addreſſed himſelf to Maupertuis, who had not yet openly teſtified his ſentiments, and requeſted his interference with the chief judge. Maupertuis returned a haughty refuſal, and Voltaire perceived he had another enemy. This ridiculous ſuit, at length, ended as it ſhould do; the jew was condemned, and was pardoned by Voltaire. The king then admitted Voltaire once more, and added new marks of reſpect to former kindneſs, by beſtowing on him a houſe near Potſdam.

The eyes of hatred, however, are always open and watchful of opportu-

nity.

nity. La Beaumelle, a proteſtant, and native of Languedoc, firſt an apprentice to a goſpel miniſter at Geneva, and afterwards acting the French wit in Denmark, being ſoon diſmiſſed from Copenhagen, came to ſeek his fortune at Berlin; having no other title to fame than that of having lately publiſhed a libel. He went to Voltaire, and preſented the book to him, in which Voltaire himſelf was ill treated, and in which the men of wit, who had been invited into Pruſſia, among whom he was come to ſolicit a place, was compared to apes or theſe dwarfs who had formerly been maintained at certain courts. Such a ridiculous overſight

was the momentary object of pleasantry at the king's supper; but the jests were reported to La Beaumelle by Maupertuis, who, charging them all to the account of Voltaire, made La Beaumelle his irreconcilable foe, and secured to himself a tool, who aided his malice by shameful libels, without bringing the character of the president of the academy in question.

Maupertuis wanted assistance; he had lately advanced the *least possible action*, as a new mechanical principle, which was much controverted, though the illustrious Euler did it the honour of defending it, and at the same

time inſtructed its author in its full extent and true uſe. Koënig not only oppoſed it, but aſſerted it was not new, and quoted the fragment of a letter from Leibnitz, in which it was contained. Maupertuis, having learnt from Koënig himſelf that he had only a copy of the letter from Leibnitz, thought proper formally to ſummons him before the academy of Berlin, to produce the original. Koënig anſwered that he obtained his copy from the unfortunate Henzi, who had long ſince been beheaded, for having attempted to deliver the people of the Canton of Bern from the tyranny of the ſenate. The original was not to be found among the remaining papers

of Hienzi, and the academy, from motives partly of fear and partly of meanness, declared Koënig unworthy of the title of academician, and struck him from their list. Maupertuis seemed not to have known that the general voice of the learned only could bestow, or take from him, the honour of making a discovery, that this opinion must be free and voluntary, and that any formal act, by rendering it suspicious, would but diminish its authority.

Voltaire had been acquainted with Koënig at Cirey, where he came to give lessons in the doctrines of Leibnitz to Madame du Chatelet. He had preserved

ſerved a degree of friendſhip for him, though he had ſometimes indulged himſelf in jeſts to his diſadvantage, during his reſidence in France. He did not love Maupertuis, and hated perſecution, whatever form it might aſſume to torment mankind; he therefore openly took the part of Koënig, and publiſhed ſome writings, in which reaſon and juſtice were ſeaſoned by delicate and poignant wit. Maupertuis engaged the vanity of the king in behalf of the honour of his academy, and prevailed on him to exact a promiſe from Voltaire to ridicule neither it nor its preſident. The promiſe was given, but unfortunately the king, who had

commanded ſilence, imagined he himſelf might ſpeak. He wrote ſeveral humourous pieces, which, but with ſome little inequality, were partly againſt Maupertuis, and partly againſt Voltaire. The latter imagined that the king, by this conduct, had releaſed him from his promiſe, and that the privilege of being the only one who ſhould laugh was not included in the royal prerogative. He, therefore, profited by a general permiſſion which he had formerly obtained, and ſent his *Akakia* to the preſs, in which Maupertuis was devoted to eternal ridicule.

The king laughed. He had little affection, and leſs eſteem for Maupertuis;

tuis; yet, jealous of his own authority, he caused this piece of humour to be burnt by the hangman. This is a mode of vengeance which it is rather singular that a philosophic king should borrow from the inquisition.

The insulted Voltaire sent the monarch his cross, his key, and the patent for his pension, with the four following lines—

*Je les reçu avec tendresse,*
*Je les renvoie avec douleur;*
*Comme un amant, dans sa jalouse ardeur,*
*Rend le portrait de sa maîtresse*.*

* These gifts I took, with joy of heart,
From them with grief, as great, I part;
The jealous lover, thus, returns
Her gifts, for whom his bosom burns.

He ſighed for freedom, but he could not obtain this by ſending back what he at firſt had called *ſplendid baubles*, but which he ever afterward named *marks of ſlavery*. He wrote from Berlin, where he was ill, for permiſſion to depart. The king, who wiſhed to humble but not to loſe him, ſent him ſome bark, but no permiſſion. He again wrote that it was neceſſary he ſhould go and drink the waters of Plombiers; he was anſwered, thoſe of Sileſia were equally ſalutary.

Voltaire, at length, thought proper to aſk to ſee his majeſty, flattering himſelf that by his preſence he could awaken

awaken ſentiments which were rather wounded than extinct.

The baubles he had formerly poſſeſſed were returned to him. He haſtened to Pouſdam, ſaw the king, and a few moments produced a total change. Familiarity revived, former chearfulneſs was recovered even at the expence of Maupertuis, and Voltaire obtained permiſſion to go to Plombiers, on giving his promiſe to return. This promiſe was not, perhaps, very ſincere, but it was leſs obligatory than one given between equals; the hundred and fifty thouſand men, who guarded the Pruſſian frontiers would not ſuffer

it

is to be considered as given with entire freedom.

Voltaire hastened to Leipsic, where he made some stay, to recover his strength, which had been exhausted by this long persecution. Maupertuis sent him a ridiculous challenge, the only effect of which was, that it opened a new source to his inexhaustible pleasantry. From Leipsic he went to visit the Duchess of Saxe-Gotha, a princess, who cultivated letters, loved philosophy, and was superior to prejudice. At her request he there began his Annals of the Empire.

From

From Gotha, he departed for Plombiers; and took the road to Frankfort. Maupertuis was determined on revenge; his challenge had been unſucceſsful, and the libels of La Beaumelle he thought inſufficient. This his contemptible ſecond had been obliged to quit Berlin, after a ridiculous adventure and ſome weeks impriſonment. He had fled to Gotha with a chamber-maid, who had robbed the miſtreſs ſhe had left; his libels had driven him from Frankfort; and he had ſcarcely arrived at Paris before he was thrown into the Baſtile. The preſident of the academy at Berlin had therefore to ſeek another avenger. He embittered the

ill

ill humour of the king. The ſlowneſs with which Voltaire travelled, his ſtay at Gotha, and a conſiderable annuity for the lives of himſelf and his neice Madame Denis purchaſed of the Duke of Wirtemberg, all ſpoke his determination of never returning to Pruſſia, and he had taken with him a copy of the poetical works of the king, which were then only known to the wits of the court.

A fear was excited in Frederic's mind that a ſpecies of vengeance, terrible even to a royal poet, would be taken. It was poſſible, at leaſt, that Voltaire ſhould imagine he had a right to reclaim

claim the verſes he had given, and to ſpecify thoſe he had corrected. The king gave a knave, whom he kept in his pay at Frankfort to purchaſe or kidnap men for him, an order to arreſt Voltaire, and not to releaſe him till he ſhould have yielded up his croſs, his key, and the grant of his penſion, together with the poems which Freitag called "the work of *Poeſhys* of the king his maſter." Theſe volumes had unfortunately been left at Leipſic, and Voltaire was kept in cloſe confinement for three weeks. Madame Denis his neice, who had come to meet him, was treated with like rigour. Guards were placed at the door, and a ſoldier continued

in

in each of their chambers who never ſuffered them to leave his ſight, ſuch fears were entertained leaſt the work of *Poeſsys* ſhould eſcape. This precious pledge was at length reſtored to Freitag, and Voltaire was releaſed; but not however till he had been obliged to beſtow money on certain adventurers who took that opportunity to commence litigious ſuits: having eſcaped from Frankfort he went to Colmar.

The King of Pruſſia, aſhamed of his ridiculous anger, diſavowed the proceedings of Freitag, but he had ſo much morality as not to puniſh him for having obeyed. It is ſtrange that a

city,

city, calling itself free, should suffer a foreign power to commit such vexations within its walls; but freedom and independence are to the feeble mere words. During the period of his friendship for Voltaire, Frederic, in the transports of enthusiasm, has often kissed his hands; and Voltaire, after his imprisonment, comparing the two periods, said to his friends—"He has a hundred times kissed the hand he so lately manacled."

The only work he published at Berlin was the age of Louis XIV. which is the sole history of that reign, which can be read. On the authority of the old

courtiers of Louis XIV. or of those who had lived in intimacy with them, he there relates a small number of anecdotes selected with discernment, and such as serve to paint the spirit and character of the persons of the age. Political and military events are given in a rapid, interesting manner; the picture abounds with bold strokes. In some chapters, he recounts the attempts which Louis XIV. made for the improvement of the laws and finances, and for the encouragement of trade and industry; and we ought to pardon Voltaire for having, on this occasion, followed the opinions of the most enlightened men of

of his own times, inſtead of that knowledge which did not then exiſt.

His chapters on Calviniſm, Janſeniſm, Quietiſm, and the diſpute on the Chineſe ceremonies, are models of the manner in which a prudent friend of truth ought to treat theſe maladies ſo diſgraceful to man, when the number or the power of the diſeaſed is ſuch as to make it neceſſary gently to raiſe the veil which conceals their deformity. We have only to reproach him with too much ſeverity againſt the Calviniſts, whoſe enormities proceeded from ſelf-defence, and whoſe crimes were but a kind of repriſal of juridical murders

committed on them in certain provinces.

The discoveries made in the sciences, and the progress of the arts, Voltaire related with clearness, precision, and impartiality; and his decisions continually appeared dictated by a free and sound mind, and a mild indulgent philosophy.

The catalogue of the writers of the age of Louis XIV. was an original thought. It had never before entered the imagination, thus, by a trait or a few lines, to paint men of literature, philosophers, and poets, without dryness

neſs or affectation, with taſte ſeldom miſtaken, and accuracy ever poignant.

The work brought foreign nations acquainted with Louis XIV. among whom he had been diſfigured by a multitude of libels, and taught them to reſpect a people whom they had previouſly viewed through the falſe medium of prejudice, jealouſy, and hatred. The countrymen of Voltaire were leſs indulgent. Such as were ſlaves from condition or character were highly offended that a Frenchman ſhould dare to diſcover follies in Louis XIV. Prejudiced people were angry at the freedom with which he treated the miſ-

takes of generals, and the defects of great writers; and others, who in some respects were more just, reproached him with too much indulgence or enthusiasm. But history is never impartially judged in the country to which it relates, the decisions of whose inhabitants are continually perverted by jarring interests and pre-conceived false ideas.

Voltaire passed near two years in Alsatia, during which he published his Annals of the Empire, the only chronologic abridgement which can be read without weariness, because it is written in a rapid style and abounds with philosophic

loſophic deductions, expreſſed with energy. Thus Voltaire has given a model of that kind of writing, the merit and utility of which his friendſhip for the Preſident Hénault induced him to exaggerate.

He thought, at firſt, of ſettling in Alſatia; but, unfortunately, the Jeſuits attempted to convert him, and, not ſucceeding, began to diſſeminate calumniating rumours which beſpoke perſecution. Voltaire endeavoured to obtain not permiſſion to return to Paris, for this he had never been forbidden, but an aſſurance that he ſhould not be diſagreeable to the court. He knew France

too well not to be ſenſible that, odious as he was by his love of truth to all powerful bodies, he muſt ſoon become the object of their perſecution, would the court ſuffer him to be oppreſſed.

The anſwer was not to his ſatisfaction. Voltaire found himſelf unprotected in his own country, though his name ſupported its honour, at that time degraded throughout Europe by ridiculous quarrels concerning Billets of Confeſſion; and at the very moment when, by his publication of the Age of Louis the XVth, he had erected a monument to its glory. He determined to go and drink the waters of Aix, in

Savoy.

Savoy. Paſſing through Lyons, Cardinal de Tençin, famous for the converſion of Laſs and the council of Embrun, informed him he could not invite him to dinner, becauſe Voltaire was out of favour at court. But the inhabitants of that opulent city, in which the ſpirit of trade has not effaced the love of letters, recompenſed him for the politic incivility of their archbiſhop. He there received thoſe honours which public enthuſiaſm pays to genius. His pieces were played before him, amid the loud acclamations of a people, inebriated with the joy of poſſeſſing the man to whom they were indebted for ſuch dignified pleaſures. But he durſt not fix

his abode at Lyons; the conduct of the Cardinal informed him he was not far enough from his enemies.

Paſſing through Geneva, to conſult with Tronchin, the beauty of the country, the equality which appeared to prevail there, the advantage of being out of France, and in a city where French was the language of the people, the freedom of thought which was greater than in a monarchial or catholic country, and the liberty of the the preſs, founded indeed leſs on the laws than on the intereſts of trade, all determined him to fix his retreat in that place.

But

But he ſoon perceived that a city in which the pedantic and auſtere ſpirit of Calvin had taken deep root, where the vanity of imitating ancient republics, and the jealouſy of the poor againſt the rich had eſtabliſhed ſumptuary laws, where theatrical exhibitions offended both Calviniſtic fanaticiſm, and republican rigour, would to him neither be a ſafe nor an agreeable reſidence. He determined to procure a place of refuge in the territories of Geneva againſt Catholic perſecution, and a retreat in France againſt puritanical gloom, and accordingly to live alternately at Tourney, ſince called Ferney, in France, and the *Delices* at the gates of Geneva.

Here

Here he fixed his abode with Madame Dennis his niece; who, being a widow without children, was free to indulge her friendship for her uncle, and to acknowledge the kindness with which he had rendered her circumstances easy. She took on herself the charge of his domestic affairs; and, to increase his tranquillity, by relieving him from such fatiguing trifles. This was the only aid he received; labour was to him an inexhaustible source of enjoyment; and freedom was all he wanted to render his moments happy.

Hitherto, we have written the tempestuous life of a philosophic poet, whose

whose love for truth, and whose independence of character had occasioned him more enemies than friends, who gave no reply to their malice except by epigrams which were either witty or dreadfully severe, and whose conduct had more frequently been guided by the sensations of the moment than the result of any plan which reason had formed.

In his present retirement, removed from illusion and whatever could excite momentary or personal passion, we shall see him yield entirely to his prevailing and incessant love of fame, to the still more potent necessity his

mind

mind felt of being productive, and to his zeal for the deſtruction of prejudice, which was indeed the moſt powerful and active of all the ſenſations he felt. This peaceful life, ſeldom diſturbed, and then by the threats of perſecution, rather than perſecution itſelf, we ſhall ſee adorned not only, like his youth, by the exerciſe of private benevolence, a quality common to all men whoſe hearts have not been hardened and minds corrupted by misfortune or vanity, but by thoſe acts of enlightened and bold benevolence, which, while they relieve the ſufferings of certain individuals, are of ſervice to the whole human race.

And

And hence it was that, indignant to behold a corrupt miniſter purſue the the unfortunate Byng to death that he might conceal his own errors and flatter the pride of the Engliſh populace, Voltaire, in order to reſcue this innocent victim from the Machiavelian arts of Pitt, employed every means which genius and compaſſion could inſpire, and ſingly raiſed his voice againſt injuſtice; while aſtoniſhed Europe in ſilence ſaw ſuch an example of atrocity worthy of the moſt barbarous times, which England dared to give in this age of humanity and knowledge.

The firſt work he ſent from his retreat was the Orphan of China, a tragedy

gedy written during his residence in Alsatia, at a time when he hoped he might have been allowed to live at Paris, and was desirous of theatrical success to secure his friends and impose silence on his foes.

In the commencement of the tragic art, poets were certain of astonishing the mind by giving to their characters sentiments contrary to nature, and by sacrificing the true feelings of the heart to the more uncommon love of fame, exaggerated patriotism, and devotedness to princes.

As reason, at such a period, is even inferior to taste, vulgar opinion seconds

such

ſuch as employ thoſe means, or are ſeduced by them. Leontine neceſſarily inſpires admiration; and the haughtineſs of his character induces an audience, who idolize their king, to pardon him the ſacrifice of his ſon. But when means like theſe, of producing effects by a departure from nature, begin to be exhauſted, and when art improves, the poet is then obliged to write more conformably to reaſon, and ſeek reſources in nature herſelf. Yet, ſuch is the force of habit, the ſacrifice of Zamti, founded indeed on more dignified and powerful motives than that of Leontine, expiated by tears and regret, ſeduced the ſpectators.

Aſtoniſh

Aſtoniſhment only was excited at the firſt repreſentation of the Orphan, by the following truly philoſophic lines:

*La Nature et l'Hymen, voilà les lois prémières,*
*Les droits sacrés des liens des nations entières;*
*Ces lois viennent des dieux, le reſte eſt des humains**.

The audience heſitated, and the voice of nature needed the aid of reflection in order to be heard. Thus can a great poet ſometimes decide the mind between ancient errors and truths, which, to vanquiſh wavering yet ſtill oppoſing prejudice, is obliged to wait for new ſupport. Men often dare not

* Nature and Hymen firſt gave laws to earth;
Their origin divine, the reſt is human all.

confeſs

confess to themselves the slow progress which reason makes in their minds: but they are ready to follow her when appearing in a strong and effective manner, they are obliged to acknowledge her presence. Thus those same verses have since been continually heard with transport, and Voltaire enjoyed the pleasure of having avenged nature.

This play is the triumph of virtue over power, and of the laws over arms. Till then, Mahomet excepted, no poet had successfully made one of these men, whose fame appears awful, and whose characters present the picture of ex-

extraordinary strength of mind, in love without degradation. Voltaire, at a second time conquered this difficulty; the love of Gengis Khan is interesting in despight of the violence and ferocity of his character, because it is true and impassioned, because it wrests from him a confession of the vacancy his heart felt amid all his power, and because he at last sacrifices his love to fame, and his thirst of conquest to the charms, before unknown to him, of pacific virtues.

The repose of Voltaire was soon disturbed by the publication of the Maid of Orleans. This poem, in which licentiousness

centiouſneſs and philoſophy are combined, and truth aſſumes the maſk of ſatiric and voluptuous humour, was begun about the year 1730, but had never been finiſhed. The author had intruſted what he had written of it only to a few of his friends, and to ſome princes. The rumour of its exiſtence had brought down menace on him; and, by not finiſhing it, he took the ſureſt means to avoid the dangerous temptation of making it public. Copies unfortunately got abroad, one of which fell into inimical and ſelfiſh hands, and the work appeared not only with ſuch defects as the author had left, but with lines added by the editors full of groſſ-

ness and ill taste, and with satiric traits which might endanger the safety of Voltaire. The desire of gain, the pleasure of attributing their own wretched verses to a great poet, and the more malignant pleasure of exposing him to persecution, were the motives of this act of infidelity, the honour of which was divided between la Beaumelle and the Ex Capuchin Maubert.

They succeeded only so far as to trouble that repose for a moment which they wished to destroy. His friends evaded the persecution, by proving the work to be spurious, and the hatred of

of the editors ſerved him whom it meant to wound.

This, however, obliged Volcaire to finiſh the poem, and preſent a work to the world, at which the author of Mahomet and the age of Louis XIV. need not bluſh. The work excited lively feelings of enthuſiaſm in a numerous claſs of readers, while the foes of Voltaire affected to decry it as unworthy of a philoſopher, and almoſt as a blemiſh on the writings and the life of a poet.

But, if it be uſeful to render ſuperſtition ridiculous in the eyes of

men addicted to voluptuouſneſs, and by the very weakneſs which hurries them into diſſipation deſtined ſome time to become the unfortunate victims or the dangerous tools of this vile tyrant of men, if affectation of auſterity in manners, if the exceſſive value attached to their purity, be ſerviceable only to hypocrites who, wearing the maſk of chaſtity, may neglect every other virtue, and caſt a ſacred veil over the moſt pernicious vices of ſociety, ſuch as intolerance and perſecution, if accuſtoming the world to regard thoſe errors from which men of honour and conſcience are not exempt as crimes, the power of that dangerous ſect, who govern

govern and disturb the world be extended over the purest minds by their having exclusively rendered themselves the interpreters of celestial justice, we shall then only behold in the author of the Maid of Orleans the foe of hypocrisy and superstition.

Voltaire himself, when speaking of la Fontaine, has well remarked that works, in which voluptuousness and humour are mingled, amuse without heating or seducing the imagination. And if such works be sources of pleasure to the fancy, which lighten the uneasy moments of life, diminish the misfortunes of privation, unbend a mind

fatigued by labour, and fill up moments in which the weary and ſunken ſoul can neither act nor meditate with effect, wherefore rob men of an aid which nature preſents? What will be the effect of ſuch reading? No other than that of diſpoſing men to more mildneſs and indulgence. It was not ſuch books that Gérard or Clement read; or that the ſcouts of Cromwell carried in the pommels of their ſaddles.

Two works very different in themſelves appeared at the ſame epoch: the poem on Natural Law, and the poem of the Deſtruction of Liſbon. To diſplay morals, the principles of which

reaſon

reaſon teaches all men, which age ſanctioned by their hearts, and which remorſe informs them it is their duty to practiſe; to ſhew that theſe are the principles which God, the common father of men, alone could impart, ſince they alone are uniform; to prove that the duty of individuals is mutually to pardon their miſtakes, and that of ſovereigns to prevent the pernicious tendency of thoſe vain opinions which fanaticiſm and hypocriſy ſupport, by wiſely treating them all with indifference; ſuch is the purport of the poem on Natural Law.

This work, the fineſt which man ever conſecrated to the Deity, excited

the

the anger of the devotees, who called it the poem of Natural Religion; though religion is only mentioned in order to oppose intolerance, and though there is no such a thing as natural religion. It was burnt by the parliament of Paris, which began to be terrified, as well at the progress of reason as at that of Molinism. Under the conduct, at this period, of men who were either blinded by pride or false policy, it imagined it would be more easy to impede the advancement of knowledge than to merit the applause of the enlightened. It felt not the want itself had of the good opinion of the public; it misconstrued those who were to be

its

its guides, and declared itself the enemy of men of letters, at that precise moment when the ſuffrage of theſe men in France, and even over all Europe, began to acquire influence.

However the poem of Voltaire, which has ſince been commented on in various celebrated books, is ſtill that in which the connexion between morality and the being of a God is moſt clearly demonſtrated. Thirty years later and the book which was burnt as impious would almoſt have appeared a work of religion.

In the poem on the Deſtruction of Liſbon, Voltaire indulged thoſe ſenti-

ments

ments of terror and melancholy which this dreadful accident inſpired. He led the tranquil ſect of Optimiſts amid theſe fearful ruins, combated their cold and puerile doctrine with the indignation of a philoſopher deeply ſenſible of the ſufferings of mankind, expoſed the difficulties on the origin of evil in their full force, and avowed it is impoſſible for them to be ſolved by man.

This poem, in which at the age of more than ſixty the mind of Voltaire, warmed by a love of humanity, diſplays all the ſtrength and fire of youth, was not the only work in which he

oppoſed

oppoſed Optimiſm. He publiſhed Candide, the firſt of philoſophic romances; which ſpecies of writing he brought from England, and added to its perfection. It is a kind of compoſition which appears eaſy of execution, but it requires an uncommon talent; that of expreſſing by a jeſt, a flight of the fancy, or by the incidents of the romance, the reſult of profound philoſophy, without ceaſing to be natural, pleaſing, and accurate. Hence it is neceſſary to ſelect ſuch effects as need neither developement nor proof, and at once to avoid common place unworthy of repetition, and abſtraction which is too deep or too new, and which is

not

not indipped to the multitude: that is, it is neceſſary to be, without appearing to be, a philoſopher.

We may add, few books of philoſophy are more uſeful. Such romances are read by frivolous men, whom the very name of philoſopher diſguſts or renders gloomy, and who, however, it is requiſite ſhould be freed from prejudice, and made the opponents of the herd who are intereſted in its defence. The human race would be condemned to eternal error if, to free them from it, it were neceſſary to ſtudy and underſtand the proofs of truth. Fortunately the native intelligence of

the

the mind is sufficient for the comprehending of those simple truths which are the most essential. It is therefore sufficient to discover some means of fixing the attention of the indolent, and of engraving these truths in their memory; and this is the great use of philosophic romances, and the merit of those in which Voltaire has alike surpassed his imitators and his models.

Candide was soon followed by a free translation of the book of Ecclesiastes, and a part of the song of Solomon.

Madame de Pompadour had been perfuaded that it would be profoundly politic

politic for her to assume the mask of devotion, by which she might shield herself from the scruples and inconstancy of the king, and at the same time calm the hatred of the people. She wished to make Voltaire an actor in this farce. The duke de la Valiere proposed to him to translate the Psalms, the book of Proverbs, Solomon's song, and the Ecclesiastes. The edition was to have been printed at the Louvre, and the author to have returned to Paris under the protection of the religious favorite. But Voltaire could not act the hypocrite, not even to be made a cardinal, some hopes of which were given him about this time. Such

proposals

proposals generally considered, and
were they made in the quality of
them, would, for the very certainty
who must be a dangerous enemy might
become a still more dangerous friend.
Let us suppose Calvin or Luther called
to the purple, when they might have
accepted the dignity without disgrace,
and let us imagine what would have
been the consequence. These baubles
of vanity do not agitate souls impelled
by the ambition of reigning over the
minds of men; they do but supply new
arms.

Voltaire, however, was tempted to
make essays in translation, and re-

honest his religious repute, but to ex-
tract himself is another species of com-
position. When they appeared, the
clergy imagined he only had intended
to parody that which he had translated,
and exclaimed it was blasphemy. They
did not imagine that Voltaire had
restored and purified the text; that
his Ecclesiastes had less of the doctrine
of materialism than the original; and
that his song of songs was less indecent
than the sacred text. These works
were therefore once more burnt, for
which Voltaire avenged himself by a
satiric and humourous letter, in which
he mocked at the hypocrisy of morals,
the peculiar vice of the modern nations

of Europe, which has contributed more than is imagined to deſtroy that energy of character by which the ancients were diſtinguiſhed.

In 1757, the firſt edition of his works, actually made under his own inſpection, was printed. He reviſed it with rigorous attention, ſelected ſome of his numerous fugitive pieces with ſeverity, but with judgment, and added his immortal Eſſay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations.

Voltaire had long complained that among the moderns eſpecially, the hiſtory of a country was that of its

kings, or its chiefs; that it ſpoke only of wars, treaties, and civil commotions; and that the hiſtory of morals, arts, ſciences, legiſlation, and political government, had been almoſt forgotten. Thoſe very ancients in whoſe writings we find moſt of morals, and internal politics, have only in general added, to the hiſtory of wars, that of popular factions. We imagine, while we read ſuch hiſtorians, that the human race was created only to exhibit the political or military talents of a few individuals; and that the object of ſociety is not the happineſs of the ſpecies, but the pleaſure of having revolutions to read, or to relate.

Voltaire formed the plan of a hiſtory which ſhould contain all that was moſt important for men to know: ſuch as the effects produced on the peace and happineſs of nations, their prejudices, knowledge, virtues, and vices, and the cuſtoms and the arts of different ages.

He choſe the period from Charlemagne to the preſent century; but, not confining himſelf ſolely to European nations, he intereſted and inſtructed the reader by an abridged retroſpect of the ſtate of the other parts of the globe; the revolutions they had undergone,

and the opinions by which they had been governed.

It was to reconcile Madame du Chatelet to the ſtudy of hiſtory, that he had undertaken this immenſe labour, which obliged him to read books of erudition, ſuch as would have been ſuppoſed incompatible with the livelineſs of his fancy, and the activity of his mind. The ſuppoſition that he ſhould ſerve the human race ſupported him, and erudition was not dull to a man who, having the ſagacity to detect and ridicule himſelf with the ridiculous, found an inexhauſtible ſource of this

in

in the ſpeculative or practical doctrines of our anceſtors; and in the follies of thoſe who have tranſmitted or commented on them, while admiring them either with ſincerity or hypocriſy equally laughable.

Such a work could pleaſe none, but philoſophers. It was accuſed of being frivolous, becauſe it was clear, and read without labour; and of being inaccurate, becauſe there are ſome errors of names and dates diſcoverable in it, which in themſelves are things abſolutely indifferent. Yet it has been proved, by the very reproaches of his bittereſt critics, that, in a hiſtory ſo

[illegible] writer was ever more [illegible]
[illegible] He was often taxed with par-
tiality, because he exclaimed against
those prejudices which pusillanimity or
[illegible] had too long respected; and
it is easy to shew that, far from exagge-
rating the crimes of sacerdotal despo-
tism, [illegible] has rather diminished their
[illegible] and softened their atrocity.
In fine, it was taken amiss that, in a
picture of the wickedness and folly of
[illegible] he has sometimes indulged in
[illegible] and that he has
[illegible] of human
extravagance; as if that which is often
dangerous ceased therefore to be ab-
surd.

These prejudices, which it was the intereſt of powerful bodies to diſſeminate, are not yet eradicated. The habit of generally ſeeing dulneſs and precision combined, and, by the ſide of critical deciſion of finding the inſipid ſcaffolding on which it was reared, has given birth to the other habit of thinking nothing accurate which is not pedantic. We are accuſtomed to ſee gloomy ſtupidity accompany hiſtorical preciſion; as we ſee men of certain profeſſions always clothed in black. But men of genius derive no ſatisfaction from a merit which fools can claim as eaſily as themſelves, and this merit they are ſuppoſed not to poſſeſs, becauſe

they

they alone forbear to vaunt of it. The *Travels of the young Anacharsis* will perhaps efface this too commonly received opinion.

But the eſſay of Voltaire will ever remain, to men of reaſon, a work delightful by the choice of its materials, by the rapidity of its ſtyle, by that love of truth and humanity which is conſpicuous in every page, and by the art of preſenting contraſted pictures, and unexpected ſimilarities, without ceaſing to be eaſy and natural; as well as by deducing, in language ever ſimple, grand conſequences, and making profound reflections. The author has

not

not given the history of ages, but that which we wish to remember of history; that which the mind delights to recollect.

Few books would be more useful, in a rational plan of education. While we read the facts, we here are taught the art of judging them truly, of exercising the native independence of the mind, without which man is but the servile instrument of prejudice, and of contemning superstition, fearing fanaticism, detesting intolerance, and hating tyranny, without ceasing to love peace, and that mildness of manners which is as necessary to the happiness

of

Hitherto, in private or public education, which alike are guided by prejudice, youth have studied history as disfigured by vile or superstitious compilers; and though, since the publication of the essay of Voltaire, two men, the Abbé de Condillac and the Abbé Millot, have merited not to be numbered in this class, yet, restrained by their situation, they have left the reader too much to divine: in order to understand them, we ought not to have any need of their instruction.

This

This work placed Voltaire in the class of original historians, and he has the honour of having effected a revolution in the manner of writing history, by which England indeed has hitherto only profited. Hume, Robertson, Gibbon, and Watson, may, in some respects, be considered as his scholars. The history of Voltaire has another advantage: which is, that it may be taught in England as well as in Russia, and in Virginia as consistently as at Bern or Venice. He has inserted none but such truths as every species of government may adopt. He only requires that human reason should have the right of improving itself; that the citizen should

enjoy

enjoy his natural freedom; and that the laws should be mild, and the religion tolerant. He addresses himself to all mankind, and says nothing which may not enlighten them all, without offence to any of those opinions which are so connected with the constitution and individual interest of a country as not to yield to reason, till such time as the destruction of more general errors shall have rendered the approach of truth less difficult.

In this edition, Voltaire had prefixed to his fugitive pieces of poetry an epistle addressed to his house of the Delices; or, rather, it was an ode to liberty,

 and

and sufficed to silence those who, in the height of their fanaticism, had accused him of being the enemy of liberty. In these pieces, in which refined gaiety, delicate feeling, and gallantry successively appear, Voltaire sought not to be a poet; yet every species of poetic beauty flowed from his pen when he thought not of them; he did not endeavour to display philosophy, yet throughout the whole is to be found whatever is suited to the subject, to the situation, and the characters. In such poetic effusions, as in romances, the philosophy of the poet should appear less extensive than the philosophy of the author. It is with

these

these writings as with elementary books which cannot be well written if the author's knowledge does not embrace more than that which they contain; and therefore, although these works are regarded as frivolous, those of them which stand in the first rank are produced only by men of a superior mind.

This same year was the epoch of a reconciliation between Voltaire and his royal disciple; the Austrians, already in the heart of Silesia, were on the point of completing the conquest of it; a French army was on the frontiers of Brandenbourgh; the Russians, masters of Prussia, threatened to over-

run

nia Pomerania and the marches. The Pruſſian monarchy ſeemed to be annihilated; and the prince, who had been the author of its ſplendour, appeared to have no other reſource than to inter himſelf beneath its ruins, and to preſerve his glory by periſhing in the moment of a victory.

The Margraveſs of Bareith tenderly loved her brother, the deſtruction of her houſe afflicted her, ſhe ſaw how greatly France oppoſed her own intereſts while ſhe laviſhed her blood and treaſures to ſecure the ſovereignty of Germany to the houſe of Auſtria; but the French miniſter had ſuffered from

verſe of the King of Pruſſia, nor could the Marchioneſs de Pompadour pardon his having feigned an ignorance of her political exiſtence, and care had been taken to ſend to her alſo ſome verſes which had fallen into the hand of the miniſter of the Elector of Saxony, through the treachery of a perſon employed to copy them. However there was a neceſſity of negociating with enemies, embittered by perſonal inſults, and at the very moment in which they thought themſelves ſecure of an eaſy victory. The margraveſs had recourſe to Voltaire, who addreſſed himſelf to the Cardinal de Tençin, knowing that this miniſter,

forgotten

forgotten ſince the death of Fleury who employed while he deſpiſed him, had preſerved a private correſpondence with the king. Tencin wrote; but the only anſwer he received was the order of the miniſter for foreign affairs to reject the negociation by a letter, of which they had even ſent him a copy. The aged politician, who would not formerly invite Voltaire to his table in deſtruction to the court, could not baniſh his chagrin when he found that he had offended the court by his complaiſance to Voltaire; and it ſhortened his days. In his youth, more perilous adventures had only ſerved to animate his talent for intrigue, becauſe then hope ſuſtain-

ed him, and he was among the number of men who find in power and rank a conſolation for ſhame; but, in this affair, he beheld the laſt thread deſtroyed which connected him with royal power.

Voltaire commenced another negociation, through the medium of the Marechal de Richelieu, but it was equally fruitleſs. A third, ſome years latter, was ſo far ſucceſsful as to obtain the conſent of M. de Choiſeul to receive a ſecret envoy from the King of Pruſſia. This envoy was diſcovered by the agents of the empreſs queen, and either through the inconſtancy of the French miniſter, or that M. de Choiſeul had

had acted without conſulting Madame de Pompadour, he was arreſted and his papers ſearched: a violation of the law of nations which is forgotten in the multitude of inferior crimes which politicians commit without remorſe.

During this period, ſo dangerous and ſo glorious to the King of Pruſſia, Voltaire appeared at one time to reaſſume his former influence over the monarch, at another to preſerve nothing but the remembrance of the affair of Frankfort; and it was then that he wrote thoſe remarkable Memoirs*

* We have added them as an appendix to this life.

in which neither good humour nor justice can have in the lively recollection of a just resentment. Voltaire had nobly condemned them to oblivion: chance preserved them to avenge genius for the outrages of power.

The Margravess of Bareith died in the midst of the war. The King of Prussia wrote to Voltaire, and requested him to confer an immortality on the name of his sister, of which her mild and amiable virtues, her soul equally superior to prejudices, to grandeur, and misfortune, had rendered her worthy. The ode, which Voltaire consecrated to her memory, breathes a soft sensibility,

lity, and a ſimple intereſting philoſophy. This ſpecies of compoſition is one of thoſe in which he was the leaſt ſucceſsful, becauſe it requires a degree of perfection which he could never reſolve to aim at in trifling works, and becauſe his reaſon could not yield at pleaſure to that enthuſiaſm which is ſaid to be the characteriſtic of the ode. The odes of Voltaire are only fugitive pieces, in which we find the great and philoſophic poet, but in which we perceive him embarraſſed and conſtrained by a form which ill agreed with the fire of his genius. However, it muſt be owned that his verſes addreſſed to a

princess on gaming, and, still more, the charming stanzas on old age:

*Si vous voulez que j'aime encore, &c.**

are Anacreontic odes, much superior to those of Horace, who nevertheless has, at least in the opinion of people of a somewhat modern taste, surpassed his model.

France, so superior to other nations in tragedy and comedy, has not been equally happy in lyric poets. The odes of Rousseau scarcely present us with any thing more than a seductive and harmonious poetry, which is void of ideas or filled with false thoughts.

* If you wish that I still should love you, &c.

La

La Motte, more ingenious, was yet a ſtranger to the harmony and the graces of ſtyle; and we ſcarcely cite the verſes of any other poet.

Voltaire was ſtill at Berlin when Diderot and d'Alembert formed the deſign of writing the Encyclopedia, and publiſhed the firſt volume of it. A work whoſe object it was to include the truths of all the ſciences, and to trace the lines of communication between them, undertaken by two men who joined much wit and a free daring philoſophy to extenſive and profound knowledge, appeared to the penetrating eye of Voltaire the moſt formidable

midable stroke that could be aimed at ignorance and prejudice. The Encyclopedia became the book of all men who wished to instruct themselves, but particularly of those who, without being habitually employed in cultivating their mind, yet are desirous of the power of acquiring a ready information on every object which excites in them either a transient or durable interest. It was a mass to which those, who had not time to form ideas for themselves, might have recourse for the ideas of the most enlightened and celebrated writers; in which, in short, the errors, that are respected by prejudice, would either be betrayed by the weakness

nefs of their proofs, or ſhaken by the near neighbourhood of truths which ſap their foundations.

Voltaire, having retired to Ferney, gave a ſmall number of literary articles to the Encyclopedia; he prepared ſome of thoſe on philoſophic ſubjects, but with leſs zeal, becauſe he felt that the editors had leſs need of his aſſiſtance there, and becauſe that, in general, though his great works in verſe had been formed to conſtitute his glory, he had ſcarcely ever written in proſe but with views of univerſal utility. Mean while, the ſame reaſons which intereſted Voltaire for the progreſs of

the

the Encyclopedia raiſed that work innumerable enemies. Compoſed or applauded by the greateſt men of the nation, it became a ſpecies of line which ſeparated the moſt diſtinguiſhed literati, and thoſe who had the honour of being their diſciples or their friends, from that crowd of obſcure and jealous writers, who, in the ſorrowful incapacity of giving either new truths or new pleaſures to the world, hate and calumniate men to whom nature has been more bountiful.

A work in which it was neceſſary to treat freely and boldly of divinity, of morality, of juriſprudence, of legiſlation,

tion, and of public economy, could not but terrify all religious or political parties, and all the ſubordinate powers which feared to ſee their pretenſions and utility diſcuſſed. The inſurrection was general. The journal of Trévoux, the eccleſiaſtic gazette, the ſatiric journals, the Jeſuiſts and the Janſeniſts, the clergy, the parliaments, all, without ceaſing to hate or oppoſe each other, united againſt the Encyclopedia, and it fell. The editors were obliged to finiſh and to print, in ſecret this work, to whoſe perfection liberty and publicity were ſo eſſential; and one of the nobleſt undertakings which the human mind has ever conceived,

would

would have remained unfinished but for the courage of Diderot, and the zeal of a great number of men of diſtinguiſhed learning, whom perſecution could not deter.

Happily, the honour of having given the Encyclopedia to Europe, compenſated France for the ſhame of having oppoſed its progreſs. It was, with juſtice, regarded as the work of the nation, and its perſecution as that of a policy and jealouſy equally deſpicable.

But the conteſts which the Encyclopedia had occaſioned did not ceaſe with the proſcription of that work.

Its

its principal authors and their friends, marked by the name of philosophers and *Encyclopedists*, which was disfigured as an approbrium by the enemies of reason, were compelled to unite even by this very persecution, and Voltaire naturally became their leader by his age, his celebrity, his zeal, and his genius. He had long before enjoyed some friends and a great number of admirers; at that period, he had a party. The persecution rallied, under his standard all the men of merit, whom, perhaps, his superiority would have kept at a distance from him, as it had banished their predecessors; and enthusiasm took the place of former injustice.

It

It was in the year 1760 that this literary war was moſt violent. Le Franc de Pompignan, an eſtimable man of letters but an indifferent poet, of whoſe works there remain a fine ſtanza, and a feeble tragedy in which the combined genius of Virgil and Metaſtaſio could not yield him ſufficient ſupport, was elected one of the French academy. Clouthed with the honours of magiſtracy, he thought that his dignity, as well as his works, exempted him from all gratitude; in the diſcourſe, which he delivered at his admiſſion, he permitted himſelf to inſult the men whoſe names did the greateſt honour to the ſociety that condeſcended to receive him;

him; and, clearly pointing out Voltaire, accused him of infidelity and falſhood. Soon after, Palliſſot, the venal inſtrument of the rancour of a woman, exhibited the philoſophers on the ſtage. The laws, which prohibit the ridiculing individuals at the theatre, were ſilent. The magiſtrates betrayed their duty, and ſaw, with a malignant joy, men, whoſe knowledge and influence on public opinion they dreaded, immolated in the ſcene, without recollecting that while they opened the way to ſatire they expoſed themſelves to its ſhafts. Crébillon diſgraced his old age, by approving the piece. The duke de Choiſeul, then the favourite

minister, countenanced this indignity, through a weak complaisance to the same woman, of whose resentment Palissot was the instrument. The journals repeated the insults of the theatre. Still Voltaire combated all. The Poor Devil, the Russian at Paris, Vanity, a croud of humourous pieces in prose succeeded each other with astonishing rapidity.

Le Franc de Pompignan complained to the king, and to the academy, and beheld, with an impotent grief, that his own name was obscured by the splendour of that of Voltaire. Each step he took did but increase the satire, which

which every tongue repeated, and the verſes in which he is conſigned to eternal ridicule. He made a formal propoſal to an auguſt patron, to break a promiſe which he had made to this patron himſelf, by returning to the academy, to vote for a man, in whoſe behalf the prince was intereſted. He received, in return for this ſacrifice, a polite refuſal, and had the mortification to hear his patron himſelf repeat, as he withdrew, the lines ſo terrible to him:

*Et l'ami Pompignan penſe être quelque choſe!* *!

* What, does friend Pompignan think himſelf ſomebody!

and he retired to bury his humbled pride and deceived ambition in the country: a fearful, but salutary, example of the power of genius and the dangers of literary hypocrisy.

Fréron, an ex-jesuit as well as Desfontaines, had succeeded the latter in the trade of flattering, by periodical satires, the jealousy of the enemies of virtue, of reason, and of talents. He distinguished himself in the war against the philosophers. Voltaire, who had long supported his outrages, at length did justice, and avenged his friends. In the comedy of *l'Ecossaise* (the Scotch-woman), he introduced a depraved journalist,

journaliſt, whoſe character was formed of venality and rancour. The pit, in the character, recognized Fréron, who, delivered over to public diſdain in a piece which could not fail to be preſerved to the theatre by intereſting ſcenes, and the original and forcible character of the worthy blunt Freeport, was condemned to bear, during the remainder of his life, a ridiculous and diſgraced name. Fréron, in applauding the inſult offered to the philoſophers, had forfeited his right of complaining; and his protectors choſe rather to abandon him than to avow a partiality which might have involved their own diſcredit.

Other enemies, less virulent, had been either corrected or punished; and Voltaire, triumphing in the midst of these victims sacrificed to reason and to his glory, sent to the theatre, at the age of sixty-six, the *chef-d'œuvre* of Tancred. That tragedy was dedicated to the Marchioness de Pompadour. It was the fruit of the address with which Voltaire could, without wounding the Duke de Choiseul, support the cause of the philosophers, whose adversaries had obtained a slight protection from that minister. This dedication taught his enemies that their calumnies were not more injurious to his security than their

their criticisms to his father: it completed his vengeance.

In this same year he learned that a young niece of Corneille languished in a condition unworthy of his name; "It is the duty of a soldier," he cried, "to succour the niece of his general." Mademoiselle Corneille was invited to Ferney; and she there received an education suitable to the rank that her birth had marked for her in society. Voltaire even carried his delicacy so far as not to suffer the establishment of Mademoiselle Corneille to appear as his benefaction. He wished that she should owe that to the works of her uncle, and

he undertook to publish a edition of them with notes. The creator of the French Theatre commented on by the writer who had conducted that theatre to its perfection, a work of genius, born as it were within the other, not yet formed, judged by a rival who joined to genius the gift, almost as rare, of a style that was pleasing without severity, delicate without timidity, and enlightened by a long and happy experience of the art, did not the beauties presented in that work. Voltaire speaks in it of Corneille's defects with frankness, of his beauties with enthusiasm. Never has Corneille been examined with such rigour, never has he

been praised with a feeling more profound and true. Resolved to instruct both the French youth and the youth of other countries who cultivate the French literature, he did not pardon the vices of language, the extravagance, nor the offences committed against delicacy and good taste, which are found in Corneille; but, at the same time, he taught them to know the progress which the art owes to that writer, the uncommon elevation of his mind, the almost inimitable beauty of his poetry in the morcels dictated by his genius, and those vast, sublime, words which spring suddenly from the necessity of

the

the occasion, and paint great characters with a single stroke.

The herd of writers reproached him, nevertheless, with a design of degrading Corneille, from motives of mean jealousy; whereas, throughout the whole of his commentary, he seizes, he even seems to seek, occasion to proclaim his admiration of Racine; a more dangerous rival, whom he has surpassed only in some parts of the tragic art, and whose prodigious excellence he might well envy in the height of his glory.

Voltaire, tranquil in his retreat, employed in continuing the happy war which

which he had declared against prejudice saw the arrival of an unfortunate family, the father of which had been conducted to the wheel by fanatic judges; the instruments of the ferocious passions of a superstitious people. He learnt that Calas, an infirm old man, had been accused of having hanged his young and vigorous son, in the midst of his family, and in the presence of a catholic servant; that he had been urged to commit this crime by the fear of seeing this son embrace the catholic religion, this son who spent his life in dissipation, and of whom no one in the midst of the universal effervescence could ever cite a single word, or point

to

to a single action which announced such a design, while another son of Calas already converted to the catholic faith enjoyed a pension from the bounty of this father, who was far from possessing affluence. Never, in an event of such a nature, had circumstances so concurred to banish the suspicion of a crime in the father, or to strengthen the reasons to ascribe suicide to the son. The young man's conduct, his character, the kind of reading in which he indulged, all confirmed this idea. Yet a magistrate, whose weak mind was intoxicated with superstition, and whose hatred to the protestants did not hesitate to impute crimes to them, caused

the whole family to be imprisoned. The catholic populace became inflamed; and the young man was declared a martyr. The fraternity of the penitents, which, to the disgrace of the nation, still exists at Thoulouse, performed a solemn mass for him, during which they bore his effigies, holding the palm of martyrdom in one hand, and in the other the pen with which he was to have signed his abjuration.

It was soon reported that the protestant religion commanded fathers to assassinate their children, when they designed to abjure it; and that, for greater security, they elected, in their

secret

secret assemblies the conduct of the sect. The inferior tribunal, led by the furious M. David, pronounced the unfortunate Calas guilty; and the parliament confirmed the sentence by that very small majority which is unhappily regarded as sufficient by our absurd jurisprudence. Condemned to the torture and the wheel, this miserable father died protesting his innocence; and the judges absolved his family, the necessary accomplices of the guilt, or the innocence of its head.

This family, ruined and stained by prejudice, went to seek, among men of their own persuasion, a retreat, assist-

ance,

ance, but, above all, consolation. They took up their residence near Geneva. Voltaire, whose compassion was moved, and whose indignation was roused, informed himself of the horrible particulars; and, assured of the innocence of the unfortunate Calas, he dared to conceive the hope of obtaining justice. The zeal of the advocates was excited, and their courage sustained by his letters. He interested, in the cause of humanity, the naturally susceptible mind of the Duke de Choiseul. The reputation of Tronchin had brought to Geneva the Duchess d'Enville, the great grand-daughter of the author of the Maxims. Superior to superstition,

both

heed by her native feelings and by her acquired knowledge, informed how to promote the welfare of mankind by equal bravery and courage, and embellishing by a genuine modesty the energy of her virtues, her hatred of fanaticism and oppression insured to Calas a protectress, whose zeal could not be abated by obstacles or delays. The process was commenced. To the memorials of the advocates, too profuse and declamatory, Voltaire added more nervous writings, the style of which was seductive, and calculated in some places to excite pity, and in others to awaken the public indignation, so prone to sleep among a people, at that dred time,

time, too much a ſtranger to their own intereſts. Pleading for Calas, he ſupported the cauſe of toleration; which word it was then daring to pronounce, and which is even now rejected with contempt by men who recognize the right of enſlaving thought and conſcience. Letters, abounding with that ſubtle praiſe which he could diſtribute with ſuch delicacy, animated the zeal of the defenders of the cauſe, of its protectors, and of the judges. It was, while he promiſed immortality, that he demanded juſtice.

The ſentence of Thouloufe was annulled. The Duke de Choiſeul had

the wisdom and the courage to order a tribunal of Masters of requests to revise this cause, in defending which the parliaments were all interested, whose prejudices and spirit of mutual defence left little hope of an equitable decision. In fine, Calas was declared innocent; dishonour was removed from his memory; and a generous minister caused the public treasury to repair the wrongs that the injustice of the judges had done to the fortune of this family, which was as respectable as it was unhappy. But he did not proceed so far as to compel the parliament of Languedoc to acknowledge the arrêt which overturned an act of its injustice. That

tribunal preferred the miſerable vanity of perſevering in its error, to the honour of lamenting, and repairing, the injury.

Mean while, the applauſes of France and of Europe were heard at Thoulouſe, and the unhappy M. *David*, ſinking beneath the weight of remorſe and of ſhame, ſoon loſt his reaſon and his life. This affair, ſo great in itſelf, ſo important in its conſequences, ſince it turned the attention not only of France but of other nations to the crimes of intolerance and the neceſſity of preventing them, this affair occupied the ſoul of Voltaire, during more than

three years.—"In all this time," ſaid he, "a ſmile has not eſcaped me, for which I have not reproached myſelf, as for a crime." His name, which had long been dear to the enlightened friends of humanity as that of its moſt zealous, moſt indefatigable defender, this name was then bleſt by that multitude of citizens who, devoted to perſecution during eighty years, at length heard a voice raiſed in their defence. Having returned to Paris in 1778, one day that the people ſurrounded him on the *Pont Royal*, a poor woman was aſked who that man was who thus drew the crowd after him.—"Know you not," ſaid ſhe, "that he is the ſaviour of Calas?"

He

He was informed of this anſwer, and, ſurrounded as he was by the marks of admiration which were laviſhed on him, it was this by which he was moſt ſenſibly affected.

Shortly after the unfortunate death of Calas, a young woman of the ſame province, who, according to a barbarous cuſtom, had been taken from her parents and ſhut up in a convent with a deſign of aiding ſaving grace by human means, wearied of the ill treatment that ſhe had endured, eſcaped, and her body was diſcovered in a well. The prieſt who had ſolicited the *Lettre de Cachet*, the ſiſterhood who had uſed

with barbarity the power which it gave them over this unfortunate young woman, doubtleſs merited puniſhment; but it was on the family of this victim that fanaticiſm wiſhed puniſhment to fall. The injurious reproach which had conducted Calas to the wheel was revived with a new fury. Sirven, fortunately, had time to fly; and, condemned to death for contumacy, he ſought an aſylum with the protector of Calas. But his wife, who accompanied him, fell a prey to her grief and to the fatigue of a journey, undertaken on foot, over tracts of ſnow.

Judicial forms required Sirven to preſent himſelf before the ſame parliament

ment who had shed the blood of Calas. Voltaire endeavoured to obtain other judges. The Duke de Choiseul at that time thought it necessary to respect the opinion of the parliaments who, after the decay of his influence over the Marchioness de Pompadour, and again after her death, were become useful to him, at times to free him from an enemy, and at others to afford the means of rendering himself necessary by the art with which he could appease their commotions, which he himself frequently excited.

Sirven, then, was compelled to yield to necessity, and to appear before the

tribunal of Thoulouſe; but Voltaire knew how to provide for his ſecurity, and to prepare for his ſucceſs. He had diſciples in the parliament; ſome able advocates of Thoulouſe wiſhed to partake of the glory which thoſe of Paris had acquired by defending Calas; the friends of toleration were become powerful even in this very city: within a few years Voltaire's works had changed the minds of men; they had only pitied Calas with a ſilent horror, Sirven found declared protectors, for which he was indebted to the eloquence of Voltaire, to the talent of opportunely infuſing truth, mingled with approbation, into the feelings of thoſe whom he deſigned

to work his purpoſes. The friends of truth triumphed over the abettors of the penitents, and Sirven was ſaved.

The Jeſuits had uſurped the poſſeſſions of a well deſcended family, who, by their poverty, were prevented from recovering their rights. Voltaire gave them the means of accompliſhing that; and oppreſſors of every kind, who, long had feared his writings, now learnt to dread his activity, his generoſity, and his courage.

This laſt event almoſt immediately preceded the deſtruction of the Jeſuits. Voltaire, educated among them,

had

had maintained a correſpondence with his former maſters. While they were living they reſtrained the fury of the fraternity from any open attack, and Voltaire was reſpectful to the Jeſuits, both in deference to the connections of his youth, and alſo to preſerve allies in in the party which at that time governed the devotees. But, after the death of theſe friends, wearied by the clamours of the Journal de Trévoux, which, by unceaſing accuſations of impiety ſeemed to call down perſecutions on his head, he no longer preſerved the ſame reſpect for the Jeſuits, nor did his zeal for the defence of the oppreſſed

preſſed extend to them, when they, in their turn, became oppreſſed.

He exulted in the deſtruction of an order, the friend of letters but the enemy of reaſon, which was deſirous of deſtroying all talents or of drawing them into its boſom, to corrupt them, by employing them to ſerve its deſigns, and to hold the human race in infancy, in order to govern them. Yet he pitied individuals treated with barbarity by the hatred of the Janſeniſts; and he gave an aſylum, in his own houſe, to a Jeſuit, to point out to the devotees that true humanity knows only misfortune and forgets opinions. Father

ther Adam, to whom a ſort of celebrity was given by his abode at Ferney, was not abſolutely uſeleſs to his hoſt. He played with him at cheſs, and he played the game with ſufficient addreſs ſometimes to conceal his ſuperiority. He alſo ſpared Voltaire labour in his learned reſearches; he even ſerved him as an almoner, for Voltaire wiſhed to oppoſe his fidelity in fulfilling the exterior duties of the Romiſh religion to the acculations, which were brought againſt him, of impiety.

At this period a great revolution was engendering in the human mind. Since the revival of philoſophy, reli-

gion,

gion, exclusively established throughout Europe, had been attacked only in England. Leibnitz, Fontenelle, and other less celebrated philosophers, accused of free-thinking, had respected religion in their writings. Bayle, himself, by a precaution that was necessary to his safety, while he indulged himself in all objections, assumed the air of wishing to prove that revelation alone could resolve them, and of having formed the project of exalting faith by humiliating reason. In England, these attacks had little success or effect. The most powerful party in that nation judged it useful to themselves to leave the people in darkness,

probably

probably because the habit of adoring the mysteries of the Bible strengthened their faith in those of the constitution; and they honoured the established religion as a species of social advantage. Beside, in a country where the House of Commons alone led to fortune, and where the members of that house were immediately elected by the people, an apparent respect for their opinions must necessarily be erected into a virtue by all the ambitious.

In France, there had appeared some bold writers, but the blows which they aimed were still indirect. Even the work of Helvetius de l'Esprit (on the under-

understanding) was only an attack on religious principles in general; it questioned the foundations of all religions, and left the reader to draw consequences and make applications. Emilius appeared; the Savoyard vicar's Profession of Faith contained nothing relative to the utility, toward morals, of the belief of a God, and the inutility of revelation, which is not to be found in the poem of Natural Law; but the attack was open and the persons attacked were brought upon the stage under their proper name and character, and not under that of the priests of India or of Thibet. This boldness astonished Voltaire and excited his emu-



lation.

lation. The ſucceſs of Emilius encouraged him, nor was he terrified by the fear of perſecution. Rouſſeau had not been perſecuted at Paris had he not put his name to the work, nor at Geneva had he not maintained in another part of Emilius that the people poſſeſſed not the power of renouncing the right of reforming a depraved government. This doctrine authoriſed the citizens of that republic to overthrow the ariſtocracy which its magiſtrates had eſtabliſhed, and which ſecured an hereditary authority to certain rich families.

Voltaire believed that he could ſecurely ſhun perſecution by concealing his

his name; and, by a deference to government while he directed all his force against religion, could interest even the civil power to weaken its empire. A multiplicity of works, in which he successively employed argument and humour, were dispersed throughout Europe, under the various forms which could be invented by the necessity of veiling truth, or of rendering it engaging. His zeal against religion, which he viewed as the cause of the fanaticism that had desolated Europe from the moment of its birth, the cause of the superstition that had degraded it, and as the source of the evils, which the enemies of men still

continued to inflict on them, seemed to increase his activity and his power.

"I am wearied," said he one day, "of hearing it repeated that twelve men were sufficient to establish christianity, and I wish to prove that one hundred are sufficient to destroy it."

An examination of works, which Christians regarded as proceeding from inspiration, the analization of dogmas, which have been successively introduced into the religion, the history of the ridiculous or bloody quarrels which have been excited by those, the miracles, prophecies, tales forged through legends and ecclesiastical histories,

tories, the religious wars, the maſſacres ordained in the name of God, the butchers and ſcaffolds which, at the voice of prieſts, covered Europe, the blood of kings flowing from the ſteel of aſſaſins, and the fanaticiſm which unpeopled America, all theſe were inceſſantly repeated in his works under a thouſand varied forms. He excited indignation, he wrung tears from the heart, he exhauſted the ſprings of ridicule. Men trembled at an atrocious action, they laughed at an abſurdity. Voltaire did not fear frequently to place the ſame objects before his readers, to urge the ſame reaſonings to them.—

"They tell me that I repeat the ſame things," he ſaid in one of his writings, "true: I ſhall repeat them till I ſee men reformed."

Theſe works, rigorouſly prohibited in France, in Italy, at Vienna, in Portugal, and in Spain, could not be ſpeedily circulated; all of them could not reach every reader; but there was not an obſcure corner in the provinces, there was not any nation in foreign countries, ſuffering under the yoke of intolerance, which did not feel the influence of ſome of theſe writings.

Men of liberal minds, who exiſted before only in ſome cities where ſcience

was

was cultivated, or among the learned and the great, were, by his voice, multiplied in all classes of society as well as in all countries. Soon perceiving their number and their strength they ventured to shew themselves, and Europe was astonished to find itself a country of Deists.

The zeal of Voltaire created him enemies in all those who had obtained, and all who expected to obtain, affluence or even subsistence from religion. Yet that party no longer possessed such men as Bossuet, Arnaud, and Nicole; those who replaced them by their talents and their acquaintance with phi-

losophy and letters had ranged themselves with the contrary party; and the members of the clergy who approached nearest to them in ability, yielding to the desire of not debasing themselves in the opinion of enlightened men, stood aloof or contented themselves with maintaining the political use of a belief which they would have blushed to have partaken with the people, and substituted for the credulous superstition of their predecessors a species of religious *Machiavelism*.

Defamatory writings and attacks sprang up profusely; but Voltaire, by answering alone preserved the name of

these works, which were read by none but those to whom they were useless, and who were unwilling or unable to understand either the objections or the answers.

To the clamours of fanaticism, Voltaire opposed the protection of monarchs. The Empress of Russia, the Kings of Poland, Denmark, Sweden, and Prussia, interested themselves in his labours, perused his works, sought to deserve his approbation, and sometimes seconded his zeal for the welfare of mankind. In every country the powerful, and such ministers as sought reputation and were intent on spreading

their fame through Europe, were ambitious to enjoy the ſuffrage of the philoſopher of Ferney, confided to him their hopes and fears for the progreſs of reaſon, and their projects for the increaſe of knowledge and the ruin of fanaticiſm. He had formed a league which included all the great men of Europe, of which he was the ſoul, and whoſe cry was, *Reaſon and toleration.* Did any ſtriking injuſtice ariſe in a nation, did Voltaire hear of any act of bigotry, any inſult offered to human nature, his pen expoſed the guilty to Europe: and who knows how often the fear of this ſure and terrible vengeance

But it was in France, more especially, that he exercised this dominion of reason. Since the affair of Calas, every victim, unjustly sacrificed or pursued by the sword of the law, found in him a protector, or an avenger.

The execution of the Count de Lally excited his indignation. The lawyers of Paris, sitting in judgement on the conduct of a general in India, a sentence of death passed without proof of a single determinate crime, nay mere suspicion produced as the gravest accusation,

cution, a judgment pronounced upon the teſtimony of declared enemies, on the memorial of a Jeſuit who had compiled two of them contradictory to each other; uncertain whether he ſhould accuſe the general or his enemies, not knowing which he hated moſt or which it would be moſt convenient to ruin; ſuch proceedings and ſuch a ſentence could not but rouze the feelings of every friend of juſtice, although the calumnies heaped on the head of the unfortunate general and the horrid barbarity of dragging him to death with a gag in his mouth, ſhould not have ſhaken every fibre in every heart which the habit

habit of disposing of the lives of men had not turned to stone.

Yet, Voltaire during a long time spoke singly against this enormity. The vast number of persons employed by the East-India Company who were interested in throwing the fatal consequences of their conduct on a man who no longer existed, the powerful tribunal which had condemned the general, all those whom that body included in its suite whose voice was sold to it, the other corps, who, united with this by the same name, by common functions and like interests, regarded its cause as their own, in fine, the administration,

nation, ashamed of the weakness or the cruel policy which sacrificed the Count de Lally to the hope of concealing in his tomb the faults which had lost India, all seemed to oppose a tardy justice. But Voltaire, by reiterated attacks on the same object, triumphed over prejudice, and the interests of such as are attentive to preserve and extend its empire. Just minds needed only to be informed of the circumstances; others, he hurried along with him; and when the son of the Count de Lally, since so celebrated by his eloquence and courage, had attained an age at which he could demand justice, the minds of men were prepared to applaud the attempt

attempt and to solicit its execution. Voltaire was dying, when, twelve years afterward, this unjust sentence was reversed; he heard the intelligence; his powers sprang back to life, and he wrote—"I die content; I see the king loves justice." The last words which were traced by that hand which had so long maintained the cause of humanity and justice.

In the same year, 1766, another arret astonished Europe; which, while it read the works of our philosophers, concluded that knowledge was disseminated through France, or at least through those classes of society whose

particular duty it was to inform themselves, and thought that, after a period of more than fifteen years, the birth-day of Montesquieu might have had time to comprehend his principles.

The crucifix of wood, placed on the bridge of Abbeville, was insulted, during the night. The indignation of the people was heightened and kept in action by the ridiculous ceremony of doing penance. The bishop of Amiens, confined in his old age by fanatics, and no longer capable of foreseeing the consequences of this religious farce, added to its solemnity by his presence. Mean time, the malice of a courageous

of

of Abbeville directed the suspicion of the people to the Chevalier de la Barre, a young officer whose relations were of the long robe and members of the chief magistracy, and who at that time lived with his kinswoman the Abbess de Villancourt, near the gates of Abbeville. A process was commenced, and the judges of Abbeville condemned to tortures, whose horror would dismay the imagination of a cannibal, the Chevalier de la Barre, and d'Etallonde his friend, who had taken the precaution to fly. The Chevalier de la Barre had awaited the issue of the trial; he had more to lose than the other by quitting France; and relied on the protection

of

He was only *vehemently* ſuſpected to have taken a part in the adventure of the crucifix; but he was declared to be convicted of having ſung, in parties of conviviality, ſome of thoſe ſongs which are half obſcene half religious, and which notwithſtanding their groſsneſs amuſe the imagination in the firſt years of youth by the contraſt which they form with the ſcrupulous reſpect which education inſpires toward the ſame objects; of having recited an ode whoſe author was perfectly known and at that time enjoyed a penſion from the king's privy purſe; of having made ſome genuflexions to certain libertine works which were written to the taſte

of a time in which men, led aſtray by religious auſterity, could not diſtinguiſh between pleaſure and debauchery; and in fine, he was reproached with having ſpoken in a language worthy of thoſe ſongs and thoſe books.

Theſe accuſations were all ſupported by the teſtimony of low people who had ſerved theſe young men in their parties of pleaſure, and by the *Tourrières** of convents, who eaſily find cauſe of offence.

This ſentence revolted the minds of all men; no law exiſted which ordain-

* Old women, who are intruſted to be door-keepers.

ed ſentence of death either for the breaking of images or for that ſpecies of blaſphemy of which the Chevalier de la Barre had been accuſed; thus the judges had exceeded even the penalties decreed by laws, which no enlightened man can ſtill ſee ſullying our criminal code without horror. There was no father of a family who had not reaſon to tremble, ſince there are few young men who eſcape ſuch-like indiſcretions; and the judges had condemned the unfortunate victim to a cruel death for language, in which the greateſt part of them had indulged, in their youth, in which, perhaps, they ſtill indulged, and whoſe children were as

culpable as he whom they had condemned.

While Voltaire's indignation was roused, his apprehensions were strongly excited. The Philosophical Dictionary had been artfully placed among the number of books before which it was said the Chevalier de la Barre had prostrated himself. His enemies wished it to be understood that the reading of Voltaire's works had been the cause of these indiscretions, which had been construed into acts of impiety. Still the danger did not prevent Voltaire from undertaking the defence of these victims of fanaticism. D'Etallonde, then a refugee

at Wezel, obtained, through his re-recommendation, a commiſſion in a Pruſſian regiment. The circumſtances of the affair of Abbeville were unfolded to Europe in ſeveral publications; and the judges trembled, on their very ſeats, at the terrible judgment which they had paſſed, and which dragged them from their obſcurity to devote them to a diſgraceful immortality.

The reporting judge of Count de Lally's trial, accuſed of having contributed to the death of the Chevalier de la Barre, compelled to acknowledge the influence of that power which is independ-

ent of rank or situation, and which Nature has given to genius for the consolation and defence of the human race, wrote a letter in which, actuated alternately by shame and pride, he attempted to excuse himself and suffered menaces to escape him. Voltaire replied by the following historical trait:—"I forbid you," said an Emperor of China to the chief mandarin of the historians, "to mention me, henceforward, in your works." The mandarin, on this, took up his pen. "What do you now?" said the Emperor: "I write the order which your majesty has just given me."

During

During twelve years, that Voltaire ſurvived this act of injuſtice, he never loſt ſight of the hope of obtaining reparation for it, but he had not the conſolation of ſucceſs. The fear of offending the parliament of Paris ſtill bore down the love of juſtice; and, at a time when the leaders of adminiſtration had a contrary intereſt, they were reſtrained by the fear of diſpleaſing the clergy. Governments do not ſufficiently know how much real importance they acquire, both with the people whom they govern and with foreign nations, by ſuch illuſtrious acts of individual juſtice, and how much more ſure the ſupport of public opinion is

than the deference paid them by certain bodies of men, rarely capable of gratitude, and part of whose authority over the vulgar mind it would be more politic to take away by these great examples than to augment, by proving, in the respect which they themselves pay to them, the fears which such bodies inspire.

Voltaire did not, meantime, neglect the means of avoiding the storm; he diminished his domestic establishment; and secured some property which he could dispose of at pleasure, with which he might procure a new place of refuge. Such had ever been his secret

design, in all the arrangements which he had made of his fortune, and it would have required a league among the powers of Europe, to have deprived him of independence, and to have reduced him to want. Princes and nobles were among his debtors, who do not indeed pay with much punctuality, but he had calculated the degrees of human corruption, and he knew that these same men, though they act with little delicacy in such affairs, would find means to reimburse him during the moment of persecution, when their negligence would otherwise render them the objects of the horror and disdain

dain of Europe, indignant to behold such a man oppreſſed.

This perſecution appeared for a time ready to burſt forth. Ferney is ſituated in the dioceſe of Geneva, the titular biſhop of which reſides in the ſmall town of Annecy. François de Salles, who has been raiſed to the rank of Saints, having formerly been the biſhop, in order that the heretics might not find cauſe of ſcandal in their own metropolis, it had been thought moſt proper to confide this ſee to none but a man who would not incur the reproach of pride, luxury, and effeminacy, of which

the

the catholic prelates are accuſed by the proteſtants.

But it had long been difficult to diſcover ſaints, who, poſſeſſing underſtanding or birth, would condeſcend to accept ſo ſmall a dioceſe. He who filled the ſee of Annecy, in 1767, was a man of low extraction, educated in a ſeminary at Paris, where he was no otherwiſe diſtinguiſhed than by auſtere manners, trifling devotion, and ignorant fanaticiſm. He wrote to the Count de St. Florentine, to induce him to baniſh Voltaire out of his dioceſe, and conſequently out of the kingdom, though the poet had then built a church

church at his own expence, and ſpread abundance through a country which the perſecutions againſt the proteſtants had laid waſte. But the biſhop pretended that the Lord of Ferney had given a moral exhortation againſt theft in the church after maſs, and that the workmen who were employed by him in erecting this church had not removed an old croſs with ſufficient veneration; theſe indeed were grave inducements to drive from his country an old man who was the glory of that country, and to rob him of an aſylum to which the kingdoms of Europe haſtened to bear him the tribute of admiration. The miniſter, had it been only

from

from motives of policy, could not be tempted to gratify the bishop; he therefore advised Voltaire to guard against these accusations, which the union of the bishop of Annecy with the French prelates who possessed more influence might render dangerous.

It was at this time that he conceived the idea of solemnly receiving the sacrament, which was followed by a public declaration of his respect for the church, and his disdain of his detractors; a fruitless step, which spoke weakness rather than policy, and which the pleasure of compelling his pastor to administer the communion through fear

of

of the ſecular judges, and of legally inſulting the biſhop of Annecy, could not excuſe in the eyes of the free and intrepid man who appreciates coolly the rights of truth, and perceives that which prudence requires when laws contrary to natural juſtice render truth dangerous and prudence neceſſary.

The prieſts ſuffered the ſmall advantage to eſcape which they might have drawn from this ſingular ſcene, by falſifying the declaration which Voltaire had made.

He had no longer a retreat near Geneva. He had connected himſelf,

on his arrival there, with the families whoſe education, opinions, inclinations, and fortune, were moſt congenial to his own; and theſe families had at that time formed the deſign of eſtabliſhing a ſpecies of ariſtocracy. In a city which poſſeſſed no territory, where the ſtrength of the citizens could be united with as much facility and promptitude as that of the government, ſuch a project would have been abſurd had not the rich citizens entertained the hope of engaging a foreign influence in their favour.

The cabinets of Verſailles and Turin were eaſily ſeduced. The ſenate of Bern, whoſe intereſt it was to baniſh the

the picture of republican equality from the eyes of their ſubjects, made it their conſtant policy to protect every enterprizing ariſtocracy around them; and, throughout the whole of Switzerland, ſuch magiſtrates as became tyrants were ſure of finding, at Bern, an ardent and faithful protector. Thus the wretched pride of obtaining an odious authority in a ſmall city, and of being hated without being reſpected, deprived the citizens of Geneva of their liberty, and the republic of its independence. The chiefs of the popular party employed the weapons of fanaticiſm, for they had read enough to know the influence which religion had formerly

formerly obtained in political diſſenſions, but they did not ſufficiently underſtand the ſpirit of their own age to to feel how much reaſon, aided by ridicule, had weakened this formerly ſo dangerous weapon.

It was propoſed, therefore, to put in force the laws which prohibited catholics from poſſeſſing property in the territory of Geneva. The magiſtrates were cenſured for their connections with Voltaire, who had dared to raiſe his voice againſt the barbarous aſſaſſination of Servet, which had been commanded by Calvin in the name of God to the cowardly and ſuperſtitious ſena-

tors of Geneva. Voltaire was obliged to renounce his house of the *Delices*.

Some time after, Rousseau advanced, in his Emilius, principles which developed to the citizens of Geneva all the extent of their rights, and which founded these rights on simple truths that all men could feel and all must adopt. The aristocracy wished to punish him for the publication, but it was necessary they should have a pretext: they took that of religion, and united themselves with the priests, who, in every country, indifferent to the form of its constitution and the liberty of man, promise the assistance of Heaven

to the party which most favours into-
lerance, and who become, as their in-
terest directs, sometimes the support of
the tyranny of a bigotted prince or
of a superstitious senate, sometimes the
defenders of the liberty of a fanatic
people.

Alternately exposed to the attacks
of the two parties, Voltaire observed a
neutrality, but he remained faithful to
his detestation of oppressors. He fa-
voured the cause of the citizens against
the magistrates, and that of the com-
mon people who possessed no privileges
against the citizens; for these people,
condemned to be ever excluded from

the rights of the citizens, found themſelves more oppreſſed ſince the latter, better informed of the privileges which is granted by the preſent ſyſtem of polity, but leſs enlightened reſpecting the natural rights of man, conſidered themſelves as ſovereigns, of whom the people were no more than ſubjects, and whom they thought they had an authority to reduce to ſubjection, by the ſame arbitrary power, for aſſuming which they deemed their magiſtrates ſo culpable.

Voltaire, therefore, wrote a poem, every part of which was impregnated with ſatire, and on which no reproach

can be laid, except that of containing ſome verſes againſt Rouſſeau, which were dictated by a degree of anger, whoſe exceſs and expreſſions could not be excuſed by the juſtice of the motives which inſpired them. But when, in a tumult, the citizens had ſlain ſome of the people, he was eager to receive at Ferney the families which theſe troubles compelled to abandon Geneva; and, in the very inſtant in which the bankruptcy of the Abbé Terrai, which had not even the excuſe of neceſſity, but was occaſioned only by ſhameful expences, had deprived him of part of his fortune, he was ſeen to give aſſiſtance to thoſe who had no

property left; and to build houses which he sold to others at a low price to be paid him in annuities; while he solicited the good offices of the government in their behalf, and employed his influence with sovereigns, ministers, and the leading men of all nations to procure a sale for the clocks and watches of this infant manufactory, which soon became famous throughout Europe.

In the mean time, the government was employed in opening an asylum for the Genevese at Verloy, on the borders of the lake. There it was designed to have established a city, in which

which industry and commerce would have been free, and in which a protestant temple would have risen by the side of a catholic church. Voltaire had caused this plan to be adopted, but the minister did not possess sufficient credit to obtain a law for the protection of religious liberty; a secret toleration, limited to the time of his own administration, was all that he could offer, and with that Versoy could not exist.

The year 1771 was one of the most embarrassing periods of Voltaire's life. The chancellor Maupeou and the duke d'Aiguillon saw themselves obliged to

attack the parliaments, to whom they both were objects of hatred, that they might not become their victims. The one could not obtain a part in the adminiſtration, nor the other preſerve himſelf in the office which he held there, without procuring the diſgrace of the Duke de Choiſeul. Acting in concert with Madame du Barry, whom that miniſter had been imprudent enough to make his irreconcilable enemy, they perſuaded the king that his contemned authority could never be reſtored to its vigour, that the ſtate, inceſſantly agitated ſince the peace by parliamentary contentions, could not regain its tranquillity, if he did not

by

by an act of vigour place limits to the pretenſions of the judicial bodies, which they would not venture to infringe, and if a term was not fixed beyond which they would not dare longer to oppoſe reſiſtance to the royal will.

The Duke de Choiſeul could not adopt this project without offending the public opinion, which had a long time been inimicable to him, but which was then his ſole ſupport; while his forced ſubmiſſion to the will of the people had removed him ſtill further from the confidence of the monarch, whoſe affections were alienated from him. It was probable, then, that his connections with the parliaments would

complete

complete his disgrace, and that it would be easy to persuade the monarch either that his remaining in power would be the greatest obstacle to the success of the new measures of the government, or that he would endeavour to involve the nation in war, to preserve his situation in despight of the king's pleasure.

The attack made on the parliaments was directed with equal address. Whatever could alarm the nation was carefully avoided. The king appeared only to vindicate the plenitude of the legislative power, a power which would be transferred not to the nation but to the parliaments, by admitting the doctrine

trine that the parliaments had the right of regiſtering edicts according to their pleaſure. It was eaſily perceived that this power, united to the moſt extenſive judicial authority, which was divided among the twelve perpetual tribunals, would tend to eſtabliſh a tyrannic ariſtocracy in France, more dangerous, than monarchy, to the ſecurity, the liberty, and the property of the citizens. The enemies of thoſe tribunals might therefore rely on the ſuffrages of enlightened minds, and on that of men of letters, whom the parliament of Paris had wounded by its inſolence and perſecution, by its attachment to prejudices, and by its pertinacity in

rejecting

rejecting every improvement calculated for the happiness of men.

But it is less difficult to form a political intrigue with address, than to execute with wisdom a plan of reform. The more alarming to liberty are the principles which the governing power would establish, the more necessary is it to display gentleness and indulgence to individuals. Yet, at that time, rigour was, in the minutest circumstances, carried to a puerile refinement. A monarch appears cruel, who, in the punishments which he inflicts, does not scrupulously respect, consistently with that punishment, whatever can

be

be injurious to the health, the convenience, or even the natural feelings of thoſe whom he puniſhes, or thoſe who are connected with them; but, on this occaſion, all theſe conſiderations were diſregarded. They refuſed permiſſion to a ſon to embrace his dying father; they confined a man in an unhealthful place, where his family could not approach him without being expoſed to partake of his dangers, and a ſick perſon could ſcarcely obtain leave to ſeek in the capital the aſſiſtance which that alone could give him. When an abſolute government betrays fear, it proclaims either diſtruſt of its ſtrength, the indeciſion of the monarch, or the inſtability

instability of the administration, and this gives encouragement to resistance; but this fear was displayed in making the recal of some exiles depend on a consent useless even in the opinion of those who demanded that consent.

A salutary operation does not change its nature though it be executed with wanton severity; but then the feeling and enlightened man who approves, does not defend it, should he think his duty calls on him to give the measure his support, without regret; his disgusted mind no longer acts with either zeal or affection for a cause which is dishonoured by its leaders.

Those

Thoſe whoſe minds are uninformed paſs from a hatred of the miniſter to averſion to meaſures which he maintains by oppreſſion; and the public voice condemns that which, left to itſelf, it had perhaps approved.

The great number of magiſtrates who were by this revolution deprived of their offices, the merit and virtues of ſome of them, the crowd of ſubordinate miniſters of juſtice who were connected with their fate by honour and by intereſt, that natural propenſity which leads men to join the cauſe of thoſe who ſuffer, the hatred of power not leſs natural, all neceſſa-

rily co-operated to render the measures of the minister odious, and to place obstacles in his way when, compelled to replace the tribunals which he wished to destroy, force became useless and confidence necessary.

However, the barbarity of the criminal law, the disgusting defects of the civil jurisprudence, presented to the authors of the revolution sure means to regain the public opinion, and to give those who should consent to replace the former parliaments an excuse which honour and patriotism might have been proud to avow. Ministers disdained these means. The parliament had ren-

dered

dered itself obnoxious to all enlightened men by the obstacles which it opposed to the liberty of the press, and by its fanaticism, of which the recent execution of the Chevalier de la Barre had given an example to all Europe. Yet, irritated by libels published against himself, alarmed by works in which his principles had been attacked, and, in short, desirous of gaining a support in the clergy, the chancellor thought proper to lay new restrictions on the press. The stain was not removed from the memory of the Chevalier de la Barre, nor could Voltaire obtain a revision of the sentence which would have covered those with disgrace whom

it was so particularly the interest of the chancellor to deprive of the public favour. The criminal code existed in all its horror, although eight days would have sufficed to have formed a law which would have suppressed the punishment of death so wantonly inflicted, would have abolished every species of torture, and would have prohibited excess in corporal punishment; which would have granted the accused the assistance of a counsel, would have permitted him to make a certain number of challenges without alledging his motives, would have given him the right to present evidence and to display facts in his favour, and would have made a

very

very conſiderable majority of the judges neceſſary to his condemnation; which, in fine, would have inſured him the power of knowing and examining all the proceedings. The nation, all Europe would have applauded the reform; the diſplaced magiſtrates would alone have been the enemies of theſe ſalutary innovations; and their fall the epoch, in which the ſovereign had recovered the liberty of yielding to his juſt and humane purpoſes.

In truth the ſale of judicial offices was ſuppreſſed; yet, the judges being ſtill named by the court, nothing was ſeen in this change but the facility of

placing on the seat of justice men without fortune and more easy to be seduced.

The bounds of the most extensive jurisdictions were circumscribed, but the new courts were not erected into parliaments; they were not permitted to register edicts, and this difference between those and the former tribunals was the sure presage of their destruction. In fine, the fees of the judges were abolished and replaced by stated salaries; and this regulation, among all that were adopted, was the only one which reason could entirely approve.

The authors of this revolution at length beheld its accomplishment, notwithstanding an almost universal discontent. The Duke de Choiseul, accused of secretly fomenting the resistance, unsteady as it was, of the parliament of Paris, and of having regarded the conclusion of peace between England and Spain, was exiled to his estates. The parliament, whose gratitude obliged them to assume firmness, was soon dispersed. The Duke d'Aiguillon became minister, and the parliament was succeeded by a new tribunal. In some of the provinces the parliaments experienced the fate of that of Paris, while others consented

to reunite and sacrifice several of their members. All was silent before authority; and nothing was wanting to the success of the ministers but the approbation of the public whom they scorned, and who, some years after, brought their disgrace.

Voltaire despised the parliament of Paris, and loved the Duke de Choiseul; he beheld in one an ancient persecutor who had not been disarmed but further incensed by his fame, in the other a friend and a protector. He was constant in his gratitude and immoveable in his principles. All his letters expressed his regard for the Duke de

Choiseul

Choiſeul with freedom and energy, and he was not ignorant that his letters, in conſequence of the infamous cuſtom of violating public faith, were read by the enemies of the exiled miniſter. A pleaſant tale, entitled *Barmécide**, which he wrote, is the only durable monument of the concern which this diſgrace had excited. The injuſtice with which the friends and partizans of the Duke de Choiſeul accuſed Voltaire of ingratitude was, therefore, one of the ſevereſt afflictions which he had ever endured; and it was the more poignant as the Duke himſelf partook of the injuſtice.

* The letter of *Bruldaki* to *Caramuſti*. Volume of Letters.

Ineffectually did Voltaire endeavour to undeceive him, ineffectually did he appeal to the proofs he had given of his attachment and his ſorrow;

*Je l'ai dit à la terre, au ciel, à Guſman même**:

he wrote in his grief, but he was not underſtood.

The great and people in office have intereſts, but rarely opinions. To oppoſe thoſe who agree with their preſent deſigns is, in their eyes, to declare againſt themſelves. That attachment of truth which is one of the ſtrongeſt paſ-

* To earth, to heaven, to Guſman's ſelf the tale I told.

ſions

ſions of exalted and independent minds, appears romantic to them. They ſuppoſe that a philoſopher has, like themſelves, no opinions but thoſe of the moment, and conſequently that he muſt change his profeſſions according to the temporary intereſts of their friends or patrons. They conſider him as a man made to defend the cauſe which they have embraced and not to ſupport his own principles; to ſerve under them and not to examine the juſtice of the war. Thus the Duke de Choiſeul appeared to imagine that Voltaire, in deference to him, ought either to have betrayed or concealed his opinions on queſtions of public right. An important anecdotes

dote, which proves how eaſily the pride of power and birth deſtroys the recollection of the natural independence of the human ſoul, and which diſplays the inequality of men's minds, which is much more real than that of their rank or ſituation.

Voltaire beheld, with pleaſure, the practice of ſelling judicial offices aboliſhed, the fees of the judges ſuppreſſed, and the immenſe juriſdiction of the parliament of Paris contracted within narrower limits: abuſes which he had combated, for more than forty years, with the weapons of reaſon and ridicule. He preferred a ſingle maſter to many;

many; a ſovereign whoſe prejudices are alone to be feared to a troop of deſpots whoſe prejudices are greater but whoſe partial intereſts and little paſſions are more fatal to mankind, and who, more formidable to the unprotected, are eſpecially ſo to men whoſe knowledge alarms them and whoſe glory irritates them. He was wont to ſay: "I have a ſtubborn back; I can make a ſingle bow well enough, but a hundred bows in ſucceſſion are too fatiguing."

He therefore applauded the regulations which had been adopted, and, among men of congenial minds, he expreſſed

preſſed his approbation. Doubtleſs, he perceived with what contracted views this happy opportunity of reforming the legiſlation, of unſhackling the mind and reſtoring to man the rights of men, of at once proſcribing intolerance and barbarity, and, in fine, of dating from this moment, the epoch of a revolution propitious to the nation, glorious to the prince and his miniſters, had been neglected and loſt. But Voltaire had alſo too much penetration not to feel that though the laws were the ſame the magiſtrates were changed; that if even theſe ſhould inherit the ſpirit of their predeceſſors neither their credit nor their inſolence could deſcend to them,

that the innovation, by depriving them of the blind reſpect which the vulgar entertain for all that bears the ruſt of antiquity, had deprived them of much of their power, that the public voice could alone reſtore their influence, and to obtain its ſuffrage there remained no other means than that of liſtening to reaſon and of uniting themſelves to the enemies of prejudice, and the friends of the human race.

The approbation which Voltaire gave to the meaſures of the Chancellor Maupeou, was at leaſt ſerviceable to the oppreſſed. Though he could not procure juſtice to be done to the memory of

of the unfortunate la Barre, though he could not reſtore the young d' Etallonde to his country, though the miniſter's puſillanimous reſpect for the clergy concealed from him the true intereſt of his glory, ſtill Voltaire had the happineſs to ſave the wife of Montbailli. This unhappy man, accuſed of parricide, had periſhed on the wheel; his wife was alſo condemned to death; but ſhe was ſuppoſed to be pregnant, and was fortunate enough to obtain a reſpite.

The tribunals had juſt rejected a provident law which, placing an interval between judgment and execution in

which

which the truth might be discovered and innocence displayed, would have prevented almost all their unjust decisions; and they had refused it with an intemperance which sufficed to prove its necessity.* Women alone, by declaring themselves pregnant, could escape the danger of these precipitate executions. In the space of less than twenty years the lives of three innocent persons, who had attracted the public curiosity by some particular cir-

* It is but justice to observe that all the magistrates did not entertain this high idea of their rights, and this love of power. One of them has merited the esteem and veneration of every citizen, by speaking, in the parliament of Paris, these remarkable words: *The citizens alone have rights; the magistrates, as magistrates, have only duties.*



cumstances,

cumſtances, had been ſaved by this privilege; another proof of the utility of that law which was oppoſed only by a barbarous pride, and which ought to exiſt till experience ſhall have proved that the new legiſlation (which doubtleſs will ſoon replace the old code) no longer expoſes innocence to any danger.

The trial of the wife of Montbailli was reviſed; the council of Artois, by which ſhe had been condemned, declared her innocent; and, more noble or leſs preſumptuous than the parliament of Thouloufe, they lamented the irreparable misfortune of having cauſed

an

an innocent perſon to periſh, and they impoſed on themſelves the duty of providing for the remaining days of the unfortunate woman whoſe happineſs they had deſtroyed.

Had Voltaire expreſſed his zeal againſt ſuch acts of injuſtice only as were connected with public events or the cauſe of toleration, he might have been accuſed of vanity; but this zeal was equally ardent in that obſcure cauſe, to which his name alone has given celebrity.

We have ſince ſeen, in like manner, a magiſtrate*, too ſoon ſnatched away

* M. Dupati.

from his friends and the unfortunate, intereſt Europe in the cauſe of three peaſants of Champagne; and obtain, by his eloquence and perſeverance, a ſplendid and laſting fame, the reward of zeal which humanity and the love of juſtice alone had inſpired. Men incapable of theſe actions never fail to attribute them to a deſire of renown; they know not what anguiſh the ſpectacle of an unjuſt act inflicts on a noble and feeling mind, to what degree it torments memory and thought, and how greatly it cauſes the imperious deſire of preventing or repairing a crime to be felt; they are ignorant of that emotion, that involuntary horror, which

is excited in all the ſenſes by the ſight, even by the mere idea, of an oppreſſor eſcaping with triumph or impunity; and we muſt pity thoſe who could think that the author of Alzire and Brutus needed the glory attendant on a good action, to incite him to defend innocence and to riſe up againſt tyranny.

A new occaſion of avenging inſulted humanity was preſented to Voltaire. Vaſſalage ſolemnly aboliſhed in France by Louis *Hutin (the boiſterous)*, again exiſted under Louis XV. in many provinces. In vain had a project of aboliſhing it been more than once formed. Avarice and pride had ſilenced juſtice, by a reſiſt-

ance which had fatigued the indolence of government; and the superior tribunals, compoſed of nobles, had favoured the pretenſions of the proprietors of theſe ſeignories.

This enormity tyranniſed over Franche Comté, and particularly over the territory of St. Claude, the ſecular monks of which, in 1742, owed the greateſt part of their lands, held in Mort-Main, to nothing better than falſe titles; and exerciſed their rights with a rigour which reduced to miſery an uninformed but good and induſtrious people. At the death of each poſſeſſor, if his children had not conſtantly inhabited the

paternal

paternal houſe, the fruit of his labours appertained to the monks; the widow and her offspring, without furniture, without cloaths, and without dwelling, paſſed from the competence procured by labour, to all the horrors of want. Should a ſtranger die after having dwelt a year on this ſpecies of land, ſtrucken with the feudal anathema, his property alſo became that of the monks; nor did a ſon ſucceed to the inheritance of his father, if it could be proved that he had paſſed the night of his nuptials out of the paternal houſe.

Theſe people ſuffered without daring to complain, and beheld, with mute

grief, the fruits of their economy, which ſhould have furniſhed uſeful capitals to induſtry and the culture of the land, become the prey of the monks. Happily, the conſtruction of a great road opened a communication between them and the neighbouring cantons. They learnt that, at the foot of mount Jura, there exiſted a man whoſe intrepid voice had more than once cauſed the very palaces of kings to reſound with the complaints of the oppreſſed, and at whoſe name ſacerdotal tyranny turned pale. To him they related their griefs, and in him they found a protector.

These

Theſe uſurpations, this inexorable cruelty of hypocritical prieſts, who dared to call themſelves the diſciples of an humble maſter yet wiſhed to hold men in ſlavery, were proclaimed, not only to France but to all Europe. Yet, after ſoliciting relief for many years, nothing could be obtained from the timid ſucceſſor of M. de Maupeou, except an arret of council, which forbade this baſe violation of the rights of mankind. His fear of diſobliging the parliament of Beſançon would not permit him to withdraw, from its juriſdiction, a cauſe which could not be regarded as an ordinary ſuit without ſhamefully acknowledging the legiti-

macy of the feudal ſlavery. The vaſſals of St. Claude were ſent back to a tribunal, whoſe members, the lords of the lands ſubject to this tyranny, took a barbarous pleaſure in riveting the chains of thoſe poor people; who ſtill continue enſlaved.

All they have obtained was the liberty, granted them in 1778, of abandoning their home and their country to eſcape from the dominion of the monks; but another article of that ſame law more than balanced this benefaction, ſo ineffectual to unfortunate men, whom poverty rather than the law has confined to the ſpot of their birth. In this

this very edict the ſovereign has, for the firſt time, given the name and ſacred character of property to the deteſtable rights which, even in the midſt of the ignorance and barbarity of the thirteenth century, were conſidered as uſurpations which neither time nor titles can render legitimate; and an hypocritical miniſter has made the liberty of the peaſant depend, not on the juſtice of laws, but on the will of his tyrants.

Who that reads theſe details would ſuppoſe that he reads the life of a great poet, of a prolific and indefatigable writer? We forget his literary fame,

as

as he himſelf loſt ſight of it. He ſeemed no longer to purſue any object of fame, but that of avenging the human race, and of ſnatching victims from oppreſſion.

His genius, however, incapable of inactivity, cultivated every ſpecies of literature on which it had ever exerciſed its powers, and even dared to eſſay new ſubjects. He publiſhed ſome tragedies, which we may doubtleſs, reproach with feebleneſs, and which could no longer force the applauſes of an audience whom he himſelf had rendered difficult, but in which the man of letters may gratify his taſte by beautiful verſes, and his judgment

judgment by profound, enlightened ideas, while he who is ambitious to write for the theatre may in them ſtudy the ſecrets of his art; he wrote tales, in which that ſpecies of compoſition, till then employed only to reflect pleaſing and voluptuous images, which amuſe the imagination or awaken gaiety, aſſumed a more philoſophic character, and became, like the apologue, a ſchool of morality and reaſon; he wrote epiſtles, which, if compared with his firſt works, will be found leſs correct, leſs uniformly animated, and leſs poetical; but, in return, poſſeſſed of more ſimplicity and variety, a more general and free ſpirit of philoſophy, and a

greater

greater number of those acute and deep remarks which are the product of experience. To these he added satires, in which prejudice and its patrons are ridiculed under a thousand varying forms.

About the same time, in his Philosophy of History, he gave lessons to historians, while he provoked the enmity of pedants, by unveiling their dulness, credulity, and invidious admiration of antiquity; he finished his Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, his Age of Louis XIV. to which he added the Age of Louis XV. an incomplete but faithful history, the only

one

one by which we can form an adequate idea of the events of that reign, and in which we find all the truth that can be expected in a cotemporary history, which is neither a libel nor a eulogium.

New romances, works sometimes serious and sometimes humorous, and dictated by circumstances, did not add to his reputation, but they continued to render it ever present with the public, to sustain the interests of his partisans, and to humiliate that herd of secret enemies, who assumed the mask of austerity, that they might withhold

that

that admiration which the example of Europe commanded them to give.

In fine, he undertook to aſſemble, in the form of a dictionary, all the ideas which preſented themſelves to his mind on the various objects of his reflections; that is to ſay, on almoſt all that is compriſed in the circle of human knowledge. In this collection, modeſtly entitled, Queſtions to the Lovers of Science reſpecting the Encyclopedia, he treats ſucceſſively of theology, grammar, natural philoſophy, and literature. At one time, he diſcuſſes the ſubjects of antiquity; at others, queſtions of policy,

policy, legiſlation, and public economy. His ſtyle ever animated and ſeductive, clothed theſe various objects with a charm hitherto known to himſelf only; and which chiefly ſprings from the licence with which, yielding to his ſucceſſive emotions, adapting his ſtyle leſs to his ſubject than to the momentary diſpoſition of his mind, ſometimes he ſpreads ridicule on objects which ſeem capable of inſpiring only horror, and, almoſt inſtantaneouſly hurried away by the energy and ſenſibility of his ſoul, he vehemently and eloquently exclaims againſt abuſes which he had juſt before treated with mockery. His anger is excited

excited by falſe taſte; he quickly perceives that his indignation ought to be reſerved for intereſts which are more important; and he finiſhes by laughing in his uſual way. Sometimes, he abruptly leaves a moral or political diſcuſſion for a literary criticiſm; and, in the midſt of a leſſon on taſte, he pronounces abſtract maxims of the profoundeſt philoſophy, or makes a ſudden and terrible attack on fanaticiſm and tyranny.

The conſtant intereſt which Voltaire took in the ſucceſs of Ruſſia againſt the Turks deſerves to be noticed.

Highly

Highly diſtinguiſhed by the favours of the empreſs, doubtleſs gratitude animated his zeal; but we ſhould be deceived did we imagine his zeal had no other cauſe. Superior to thoſe politics of the counting-houſe, which take the intereſt of merchants known to financiers for the intereſts of commerce, and the intereſts of commerce for that of the human race, not leſs ſuperior to thoſe vain ideas of the balance of Europe ſo valuable to political compilers, he beheld, in the deſtruction of the Ottoman empire, millions of men at leaſt aſſured of ſhunning under the deſpotiſm of a ſovereign the intolerable deſpotiſm of a whole people; he hoped

to ſee the imperious manners of the Eaſt which condemn women to a diſgraceful ſlavery baniſhed into the unhappy climates that gave them birth. Immenſe countries ſituated under a propitious Heaven, deſtined by nature to be clothed with all the productions moſt uſeful to mankind, would have been reſtored to the induſtry of their inhabitants; theſe countries, the firſt in which man diſcovered genius, would have beheld, again ſpringing up in their boſom, the arts of which they gave the moſt perfect models, and the ſciences, whoſe foundations were laid by them.

The

The uſual ſpeculations of ſome merchants would without doubt have been deranged, and their profits diminiſhed; but the real welfare of all people would have been augmented, becauſe it is not poſſible to extend the ſpace on the globe in which agriculture flouriſhes, commerce is ſecure, and induſtry active; without increaſing for the uſe of all men the maſs of enjoyments and reſources. Can it be deſirable that a philoſopher ſhould prefer the riches of ſome nations to the liberty of an entire people, and the commerce of a few cities to the progreſs of agriculture and of the arts in a great empire? Far from us be thoſe deſpicable reaſoners who would

ſtill hold Greece in Turkiſh chains, in order that they may ſeize on the perſons of men, ſell them as herds of cattle, compel them, by the dread of puniſhment, to furniſh food for their inſatiable avarice; and who gravely calculate the pretended wealth which is produced by theſe outrages on nature.

That men ſhould every where be free, and that each country ſhould enjoy the advantages given it by nature, would be the common intereſts of all people, as well of thoſe who have reaſſumed their rights as of thoſe in which certain individuals, and not the community

community, have been benefitted by the diſtreſs of others. Oppoſed to objects ſo grand and to that eternal good which would ariſe out of a revolution ſo vaſt, of what importance would the ruin of a few avaricious men be; and of men too, whoſe wealth originated in the tears and the blood of their fellow citizens!

Thus thought M. Turgot; and thus Voltaire could not but think.

Men have declaimed againſt the injuſtice of a war againſt the Turks: can we be unjuſt toward a hoard of robbers, who hold a people in ſlavery,

and whose avidious ferocity overwhelms these people with outrages? Let them return to those deserts which the imbecility of Europe permitted them to quit, since, in their brutal pride, they have continued to produce a race of tyrants! At length, let the country of those to whom we owe our knowledge, our arts, and even our virtues, cease to be dishonoured by the presence of a people who unite the despicable vices of effeminacy to the ferocity of savages!

Fears are entertained for the balance of Europe, as though such conquests would not diminish, instead of increasing the power of the conquerors; as though

though Aſia muſt not long offer an eaſy prey to the ambitious, which would give them a diſtaſte for the hazardous conqueſts which might be obtained in Europe. It is not the policy of princes, it is the wiſdom of a civiliſed people, which muſt for ever preſerve the peace of Europe; and the more civilization ſhall extend over the earth, the more ſhall we behold war and conqueſts, as well as ſlavery and miſery, diſappear.

Louis the XVth died. This prince, who had long in his conduct contemned the precepts of the moral chriſtian, was not, however, ſuperior to ſuperſtitious terrors. The menaces of religion

assumed new vigour to terrify him on the appearance of the least danger; but he imagined that a promise of continence so easily made on a death-bed, and certain words from the mouth of a priest, could expiate the errors of a reign of sixty years. Even more timid than superstitious, accustomed by the Cardinal de Fleury to consider liberty of thought as a cause of disorder in states, or at least of embarrassment to governments, it was nevertheless in despight of himself that under his reign human reason made a rapid progress in France. He who laboured for its advancement with most success and splendour was become the object of his hatred,

hatred. Yet he reſpected in Voltaire the glory of France; and could not view, without pride, the admiration of Europe place one of his ſubjects in the firſt rank of illuſtrious characters.

His death made no change in Voltaire's ſituation. To the prejudices of Cardinal de Fleury, M. Maurepas joined a ſtill more implacable hatred of all thoſe who roſe ſuperior to the ordinary claſs of men.

Voltaire had been profuſe of his exaggerated praiſe of Louis XV. till the time of his viſit to the court of Pruſſia, but

but without being able to diſarm the king's unjuſt diſlike of him. He had obſerved an almoſt abſolute ſilence from the period in which the errors and misfortunes of this reign would have rendered eulogy abject. But after the death of that monarch he dared to be juſt to his memory, at the inſtant in which nearly the whole nation ſeemed happy in wounding his name. It has been remarked that the philoſophers, whom Louis XV. did not patronize, were at that time the only perſons who obſerved ſome impartiality; while the prieſts, loaden with his benefactions, inſulted his weakneſs.

The

The new reign ſoon preſented to Voltaire hopes which he had not dared to form. M. Turgot was called to the adminiſtration. Voltaire knew him to be a man of profound genius, who, in every ſpecies of ſcience, had created ſure and determinate principles on which he had founded all his opinions, and according to which he directed the whole of his conduct; a glory that no other ſtateſman has been worthy of partaking with him. He knew that, to a ſoul zealous for the truth and for the happineſs of man, M. Turgot united fortitude that was above all fear, and grandeur of character ſuperior to all diſſimulation; that in his eyes the moſt important

important ſituation was but the means of executing his ſalutary views; and appeared to him no more than a vile ſlavery when that hope ſhould be loſt. In fine, Voltaire knew that, free from all prejudices and deteſting, in thoſe prejudices, the moſt dangerous enemies of the human race, M. Turgot regarded the liberty of thought and of the preſs as the right of each citizen, and the right of entire nations, whoſe happineſs the progreſs of reaſon alone can eſtabliſh on an immoveable baſis.

In the nomination of M. Turgot, Voltaire ſaw the dawn of the reign of reaſon; ſo long diſavowed and much

much longer perſecuted; he dared to look for the rapid fall of prejudices, and for the deſtruction of that cowardly and tyrannic policy which, to flatter the pride or indolence of men in place, had condemned the people to humiliation and miſery.

Yet his attempts in favour of the vaſſals of Mount Jura were ineffectual; and in vain he endeavoured to obtain for d'Etallonde, and for the memory of the Chevalier de la Barre, that diſtinguiſhed juſtice which humanity and the national honour equally required. Theſe objects were foreign to the department of the finances; and

that ſuperiority of information, of character, and of virtue, which M. Turgot could not conceal, had created him, in the other miniſters and in the intriguing ſubalterns of office, too many enemies; who, finding neither ambition nor perſonal projects to oppoſe in him, bent themſelves againſt all that they believed conſonant with his juſt and beneficent deſigns.

Beſide, liberty could not be reſtored to the vaſſals of mount Jura without offending the parliament of Beſançon; the reviſion of the proceſs of Abbeville had humiliated that of Paris; and an unwiſe policy had re-eſtabliſhed the

parliaments without taking advantage of their temporary overthrow, and the little credit of thoſe who had replaced them, to introduce into the laws and the tribunals an entire reform, the neceſſity of which was felt by all enlightened men. But an adminiſtration which was feeble, and the enemy of reformation, did not dare or did not wiſh to ſeize this occaſion, in which the public good had found ſtill leſs obſtacles than in the inſtance which was ſo ſhamefully neglected by the Chancellor Maupeou.

Thus alſo, through complaiſance to the prejudices of the parliaments, miniſters

fers ſuffered the advantages for the reform of education to be loſt, which was offered to them by the deſtruction of the Jeſuits. They did not even, in 1774, take any precaution to prevent the renewal of the contentions which, in 1770, had led to the ruin of the magiſtracy. They had purſued but a ſingle object, the advantage of ſecuring a perſonal gratitude, which gave to the authors of the change a means of employing the credit of the corps, whoſe re-eſtabliſhment was their work, with ſucceſs againſt the rivals of their power.

Hence the only advantage which Voltaire could obtain, from the adminiſtration

niſtration of M. Turgot, was to withdraw the little country of Gex from the tyranny of the *farms*. Separated from France by mountains, having an eaſy communication with Geneva and Switzerland, this unfortunate country could not be ſubjected to the revenue laws without becoming the theatre of perpetual war between the ſervants of the revenue and the inhabitants, nor without paying expences for the collection ſtill more burdenſome than the impoſts themſelves. The little importance of this regulation ſhould have rendered it eaſy; yet, it was long ſolicited, in vain, by M. de Voltaire,

Part of the provinces of France have, through various cauſes, eſcaped the yoke of the *Farm-general*, or have only borne half of its weight; but the farmers-general have inceſſantly increaſed their limits, and envelloped in their chains detached cantons which had long been protected by feudal privileges. They believed that their God *Terminus*, like that of the Romans, ought never to recede; and that the firſt ſtep he ſhould retreat would be the preſage of deſtruction to the empire. Their oppoſition, however, could not induce M. Turgot to abandon a juſt and beneficent operation, which, without injury

injury to the revenue, would leſſen the burden of the inhabitants, diminiſh the number of crimes and oppreſſions, and reſtore proſperity and peace to a diſtrict pillaged by deſpotiſm.

The country of Gex, then, was delivered from the yoke, on condition of raiſing thirty thouſand livres; and Voltaire had the pleaſure of writing to his friends, in a parody of a verſe of Mithridates:

*Et mes derniers regards ont vu fuir les commis*.*

Voltaire's reſpect for M. Turgot would have been augmented by the

* And, at length, I've ſeen the exciſemen fly.

edicts of 1776 had he not already known that minister's genius, and comprehended his views. This great statesman had perceived that, placed at the head of the finances at a moment in which he was embarrassed by the mass of the public debt, and by obstacles which the courtiers and the first minister opposed to every great reform in administration and to all important economy, he could not diminish the imposts; but he wished, at least, to give some consolation to the people, and some indemnity to the proprietors of lands, by restoring to them rights of which they had been deprived by oppressive regulations.

The

The remains of feudal ſlavery which ſpread deſolation through the country, which compelled the poor to labour without hire, and deprived agriculture of the huſbandmen's cattle, were changed into an impoſt, paid only by the proprietors of land. Through all the cities, ridiculous corporations obliged a part of the inhabitants to purchaſe the right of labouring; thoſe who ſubſiſted by commerce or their own induſtry were compelled to live under the vaſſalage of a certain number of privileged people, or to pay a tribute to theſe bodies; this abſurd inſtitution diſappeared, and the right of

freely employing their time and ſtrength was reſtored to the citizens.

The proprietors of grain and of wine, the firſt harraſſed by popular prejudices, the other by deſpotic privileges, which had been extorted by particular cities, were relieved from thoſe oppreſſions; and theſe wiſe laws could not fail to accelerate the progreſs of agriculture, and multiply the national wealth, by inſuring the ſubſiſtence of the people.

But theſe beneficent edicts were the ſignal of that miniſter's fall who had

the boldneſs to conceive them. They excited the oppoſition of the parliaments who were intereſted in ſupporting the *Jurandes** the fertile ſource of lucrative law ſuits, who were not leſs attached to the old regulations which furniſhed them with the means of acting on the minds of the people, who were irritated to ſee the burden of making roads laid on the opulent owners of land, and were without any hope that an unworthy condeſcenſion would continue to lighten the weight of their individual taxes, but who were more particularly alarmed at the influence

* The wardenſhip of the different companies of tradeſmen.

which seemed to be acquired by a minister, whose benevolent spirit menaced the overthrow of their power.

The intrigues of the enemies of M. Turgot were strengthened by this league of the parliaments; and it was then perceived how serviceable to their secret and pernicious designs was the manner in which the tribunals had been re-established; it was then seen how dangerous it is to a minister to design the welfare of the people; and, perhaps, were we to mount up to the cause of events, we should find that the fall even of vicious ministers has originated in the good which they wished

wiſhed to do, and not in the evil which they have produced.

In the calamities of France Voltaire beheld the deſtruction of hopes which he had entertained for the advancement of the human mind. He had imagined that intolerance, ſuperſtition, and the monſtrous prejudices which infected every branch of legiſlation, every department of power, and all conditions of ſociety, would have fled before a miniſter who was the friend of juſtice, of liberty, and reaſon. Such as have accuſed Voltaire of baſe admiration, ſuch as have bitterly reproached him with the uſe which he made of

praiſe,

praiſe, perhaps too frequently, to influence the minds of powerful men and to compel them to be juſt and humane, may compare thoſe praiſes to his eulogy of M. Turgot, and to his *Epiſtle to a Man* which he addreſſed to that miniſter at the moment of his diſgrace. They will then diſtinguiſh the admiration which is the reſult of feeling, from a compliment; and the eſteem which ariſes in the ſoul, from the play of imagination; and they will perceive that Voltaire committed no other crime than that of treating courtiers as women: nearly the ſame proteſtations are beſtowed on the whole ſex, and it is the tone alone that diſtinguiſhes

ſtinguiſhes the praiſe which is felt from that which is given to politeneſs.

Voltaire, offering incenſe to kings and miniſters to engage them on the ſide of truth, and Voltaire, celebrating genius and virtue, ſpeaks not the ſame language. Did he wiſh only to flatter, he was prodigal of the charms of his brilliant imagination, he multiplied theſe ingenious ideas which were ever ready at his call; but did he wiſh to render an homage acknowledged by his heart, it was his ſoul which eſcaped him, it was his reaſon which ſpoke. During his viſit to Paris his admiration of M. Turgot was infuſed

fused through all his discourse. M. Turgot was the man whom he opposed to all who complained of the depravity of our age; and to him his mind gave its entire approbation. I have seen him take his hands, bathe them with his tears, kiss them, in despight of M. Turgot's resistance, and cry with a voice interrupted by sobs: "Let me kiss the hand which would seal the happiness of the people."

Voltaire had long desired to revisit his country, and to enjoy his reputation in the midst of the same people who had been the witness of his first success and too often the accomplice of his enemies.

enemies. M. de Villette had lately, at Ferney, eſpouſed Mademoiſelle de Varicour, a lady deſcended from a noble family in the country of Gex, whom her relations had confided to the care of Madame Denis. Voltaire accompanied them to Paris, partly led by the deſire of ſeeing the repreſentation of the tragedy of Irene, which he had ſhortly before finiſhed. It had been kept a profound ſecret; and malice had not time to prepare her poiſon, nor would the public enthuſiaſm have permitted its operation. A croud of men and women of every rank and condition, from whom his verſes had drawn the tears of humanity, who had

ſo frequently admired his genius at the theatre and in reading his works, who were indebted to him for their improvement, whoſe prejudices he had deſtroyed, and to whom he had imparted a ſpark of that zeal againſt fanaticiſm by whoſe flame he was devoured, were eager to behold him. Jealouſy was ſilent before a glory which it was impoſſible to extinguiſh, before the benefit which he had conferred on mankind. Miniſters, and proud prelates, were obliged to reſpect the idol of the nation. This enthuſiaſm was even ſpread through the common ranks of the people; they crouded round his windows, and paſſed whole hours there with the

hope

hope of ſeeing him for one moment. His carriage, which could ſcarcely proceed along the ſtreets, was ſurrounded by a numerous multitude, who bleſſed him and celebrated his works.

The French academy, which had not adopted him till the age of fifty-two, laviſhed honours on him, and received him rather as ſovereign of the empire of letters than as an equal. The children of thoſe haughty courtiers, whoſe pride had been wounded to ſee him live in their ſociety without meanneſs, and who had wiſhed to humiliate in his perſon the ſuperiority of genius and talents, contended for the honour

of

of being presented to him, and of an opportunity to boast that they had seen Voltaire.

But it was at the theatre, where he had so long reigned, that he had the greatest honours to expect. He went to the third representation of Irene; which was, indeed, but a feeble tragedy; which, however, possessed many beauties, and in which the wrinkles of age could not conceal the sacred impression of genius. He alone drew the attention of a people, eager to distinguish his features, to observe his gestures, to pursue the direction of his eyes. His bust was crowned on the

stage

ſtage in the midſt of applauſe, cries of joy, and tears of enthuſiaſm. To quit the theatre he muſt paſs through the multitude that crouded round him; feeble, ſcarce able to ſupport himſelf, the guards, which were deſigned to protect him from the eagerneſs of zeal, became uſeleſs; at his approach, each retired with a reſpectful attention, or diſputed the honour of ſupporting him a moment on the ſtairs; each ſtep offered him new aid, nor was any one permitted to arrogate too long the right of giving him aſſiſtance.

The ſpectators followed him to his apartment, and the air was filled with

the cries of *Long live Voltaire! Long live the Henriade! Long live Mahomet!* numbers fell at his feet, and numbers kiſſed his garment. Never has man been received with more intereſting marks of admiration and of public affection, nor ever has genius been honoured by a more flattering homage; and this homage was addreſſed, not to his power, but to the happineſs which he had conferred on man. An illuſtrious poet would have been received only with plaudits: tears flowed before the philoſopher, who had deſtroyed the fetters of reaſon, and avenged the cauſe of humanity.

The

The ſublime and impaſſioned ſoul of Voltaire was moved with theſe tributes of reſpect and zeal: "They wiſh me to die with pleaſure," he ſaid; but it was the voice of ſenſibility, and not the artifice of ſelf-love. In the midſt of the honours paid him by the French academy, he was particularly ſtruck by the poſſibility of introducing into that place a more daring philoſophy: "They treat me with more attention than I merit," he ſaid to me, one day; "do you know that I do not deſpair of cauſing the eulogium of Coligny to be ſpoken there?"

During the run of Irene, he was employed in reviſing his eſſay on the

Manners and the ſpirit of Nations; and to give, in that work, ſome new wounds to fanaticiſm. He had with ſecret pleaſure obſerved, at the theatre, that the lines which were received with the greateſt acclamations were thoſe in which he attacked ſuperſtition and the names ſhe had long rendered ſacred; and it was to this object he aſcribed all the glory he had acquired. He beheld, in that general admiration, the empire which he had exerciſed over the mind, and the deſtruction of prejudices which he had accompliſhed.

At this ſame time, Paris boaſted, alſo, the preſence of the celebrated

Franklin, who, in another hemiſphere, had been the apoſtle of philoſophy and toleration. Like Voltaire, he had often employed the weapon of humour which corrects the abſurdities of men, and had diſplayed their perverſeneſs as a folly more fatal, but alſo worthy of pity. He had joined to the ſcience of metaphyſicks the genius of practical philoſophy; as Voltaire, that of poetry. Franklin had delivered the vaſt countries of America from the yoke of Europe; and Voltaire had freed Europe from the yoke of the ancient theocracy of Aſia. Franklin was eager to ſee a man whoſe reputation had long been ſpread over both worlds; Voltaire, al-

though he had loſt the habit of ſpeaking Engliſh, endeavoured to ſupport the converſation in that language; and, afterwards reaſſuming the French, he ſaid: *Je n'ai pu réſiſter au déſir de parler un moment la langue de M. Franklin**.

The American philoſopher preſented his grandſon to Voltaire, with a requeſt that he would give him his benediction. "God and liberty!" ſaid Voltaire: "it is the only benediction which can be given to the grandſon of Franklin." They went together to a public aſſembly of the academy of ſciences, and the

* I could not reſiſt the deſire of ſpeaking the language of Mr. Franklin for a moment.

public

public at the ſame time beheld with emotion theſe two men, born in different quarters of the globe, reſpectable by their years, their glory, the employment of their life, and both enjoying the influence which they had exerciſed over the age in which they lived. They embraced each other in the midſt of public acclamations, and it was ſaid to be Solon who embraced Sophocles. But the French Sophocles had trampled on error and advanced the reign of reaſon; and the Solon of Philadelphia, having placed the conſtitution of his country on the immoveable foundation of the rights of men, had no fear of ſeeing his uncertain laws, even during his own

lity open the way to tyranny and prepare fetters for his country.

Age had not enfeebled the activity of Voltaire, and the tranſports with which he was received by his fellow citizens ſeemed to renew his vigour. He formed the deſign of refuting whatever the Duke de St. Simon in his memoirs, then unpubliſhed, had written under the influence of hatred and prejudice, leaſt theſe memoirs, which might derive ſome authority from the known probity of the author and from his rank and title of cotemporary, ſhould appear at a time in which men would be too far removed from the events of which

he

he ſpeaks, to detect error and defend the truth.

He had alſo induced the French academy to adopt the deſign of forming its dictionary on a new plan. They were to have deduced the hiſtory of each word from the period in which it had appeared in the language, to give the various meanings which it aſſumed in different ages, and the various acceptations it had received, and to employ, in order to diſplay theſe varied ſhades, not capricious phraſes, but examples ſelected from authors of the greateſt authority. Then would have been ſeen the true literary and gram-

matical

matical dictionary of the language, and not only foreigners but even Frenchmen might, in that work, have acquired a knowledge of all its delicacy.

This dictionary would have presented instructive pages to men of letters, would have contributed to form the national taste, and arrested the progress of corruption. Each academician was to have explained a letter of the alphabet. Voltaire undertook the letter A; and, to excite the industry of his brethren, and to banish the difficulty of executing this plan, he was desirous to finish, within a few months, that part of the work which he had assumed.

His

His ſtrength was waſted by ſuch exceſſive application; and he had been much reduced by a ſpitting of blood, cauſed by his efforts during the repreſentation of Irene. Yet, the activity of his mind ſubdued all, and concealed from him the real weakneſs of his conſtitution. At length, deprived of ſleep by an irritation produced by too intenſe labour, he wiſhed to procure ſome hours repoſe, that he might be in a condition to lead the academy irrevocably to engage in the new dictionary, againſt which ſome objections had ariſen; and he reſolved to take opium. His imagination poſſeſſed all its vivacity, his ſoul was equally reſtleſs and impetuous, his character

abated

abated not of its gaiety and its vigour, when he took the opiate which he judged to be neceſſary. During the ſame evening, his friends had heard him expreſs his deteſtation of prejudices with his uſual eloquence; and ſoon after beheld him viewing them only on the ridiculous ſide, and deriding them with that peculiar grace and aptneſs which characteriſed his ſallies of wit. But he took the opiate at ſeveral doſes, and was deceived as to the quantity, probably in the ſpecies of intoxication which the firſt had produced. The ſame accident happened to him about thirty years before, and then placed his life in danger. Unhappily, this time, his

his waſted powers were unable to contend with the poiſon. He had long been ſubject to a complaint in the bladder, and in the general decay of his organs, that ſoon contracted an incurable diſeaſe.

Scarcely could he, during the long interval between this fatal accident and his death, preſerve his recollection for a few ſucceſſive moments, or diſengage himſelf from the lethargy in which he was plunged. To the young Count de Lalli, however, who was even then celebrated for his courage, and who has ſince deſerved celebrity by his eloquence and patriotiſm, he wrote, in one

of

of theſe intervals, thoſe lines, the laſt which were traced by his hand, in which he applauds the royal authority whoſe juſtice had lately annulled one of the attrocious acts of parliamentary deſpotiſm. At length, he expired on the 30th of May, 1778.

The arrival of Voltaire at Paris had re-kindled the fury of the fanatics, and wounded the pride of the chiefs of the hierachy; but it had alſo inſpired ſome prieſts with an idea of building their reputation and their fortune on the converſion of this illuſtrious enemy. Certainly, they could not flatter themſelves with the hope of ſubduing him,

but they did not deſpair of inducing him to diſſemble. Voltaire, who wiſhed to remain at Paris without being tormented by ſacerdotal accuſations, and who, from a habit acquired in his youth, thought it beneficial to the intereſts even of the friends of reaſon, that certain ſcenes of intolerance ſhould not ſucceed his laſt moments, had ſent in the beginning of his malady for an almoner of the incurables, and who had boaſted of having reſtored to the boſom of the church the Abbé de L'Attaignant, known by offences of another kind.

The Abbé Gauthier confeſſed Voltaire, and received a profeſſion of faith from

from him by which he declared that he died in the catholic religion, in which he was born.

When this circumſtance was known, which offended enlightened men rather more than it edified the devotees, the curate of Saint Sulpice ran to his pariſhioner, who received him with politeneſs, and gave him according to uſage a handſome offering for his poor people. But, mortified that the Abbé Gauthier had anticipated him, he diſcovered that the almoner of the incurables had been too eaſily ſatisfied with his penitent, and that he ought to have required a more particular profeſſion of faith, and an expreſs diſavowal

of

of all the doctrines, contrary to orthodoxy, which Voltaire had been accuſed of maintaining. The Abbé Gauthiers pretended that, by requiring every thing, all would have been loſt. During this diſpute, Voltaire recovered, Irene was played, and the converſion was forgotten. But, in the moment of the relapſe, the curate returned to Voltaire, abſolutely reſolved not to inter him, if he could not obtain the deſired recantation of his errors.

This curate was among thoſe men who are a mixture of hypocriſy and imbecility; he ſpoke with the obſtinate perſuaſion of a maniac, and acted with

the flexibility of a jeſuit; he was humble in his manners even to baſeneſs, arrogant in his ſacerdotal pretenſions, fawning with the great, and charitable to the populace who are governed by the prieſts that diſtribute alms to them, and in fine, he harraſſed the ſimple citizens, by his imperious fanaticiſm. He earneſtly wiſhed to compel Voltaire at leaſt to acknowledge the divine nature of Jeſus Chriſt; to which he was more attached than to any other dogma. He, one day, drew Voltaire from his lethargy, by ſhouting in his ear: "Do you believe the Divinity of Jeſus Chriſt?"——"In the name of God, ſir," replied Voltaire, "ſpeak to me

no

no more of that man; but let me die in peace."

The prieſt then declared that he was compelled to refuſe him burial; but he was not authoriſed in this refuſal; for, according to the laws, it ought to have been preceded by a ſentence of excommunication, or a ſecular judgment; and even an appeal might have been made againſt an excommuncation, as a matter of abuſe. Voltaire's family, by complaining to the parliament, would have obtained juſtice; but they feared the fanaticiſm of that body and the hatred of its members to Voltaire, who had ſo often combated its pretenſions

and exerted his powers againſt its injuſtice. They did not perceive that the parliament could not, without diſgrace to itſelf, depart from the principles on which it had acted in favour of the Janſeniſts; they did not know that a great number of the young magiſtrates waited only for an occaſion of effacing, by ſome ſplendid act, the reproach of fanaticiſm by which they were degraded, of dignifying themſelves, by ordaining a mark of reſpect to the memory of a man of genius whom they had been unfortunate enough to number among their enemies, and of ſhewing that they choſe rather to atone for their injuſtice, than to yield to any incitements of ven-

geance. The friends of Voltaire did not obſerve how much power they had acquired by that enthuſiaſm which his name had excited; an enthuſiaſm which had gained every claſs in the nation, and which no authority would venture openly to inſult.

They choſe rather to negociate with government. Daring neither to offend public opinion by gratifying the vengeance of the clergy, nor to diſpleaſe the prieſts by compelling them to obey the laws, fearing to mortify ſacerdotal pride ſhould they erect a public monument to a great man whoſe aſhes were baſely diſturbed by prieſts, or

ſhould they indemnify his memory for the loſs of eccleſiaſtic honours, to which he had ſo little claim, by civil honours due to his genius and the ſervices he had done the nation, miniſters approved a propoſal which was made of removing Voltaire's body to the church of a monaſtery, of which his nephew was abbé. It was accordingly conducted to Scellières, and the prieſts agreed not to interrupt the execution of this deſign. However, two ladies, of diſtinguiſhed rank and very great devotees, wrote to the biſhop of Troyes to engage him, in quality of diocean biſhop, to oppoſe the burial. But, fortunately for the honour of the biſhop,

biſhop, theſe letters arrived too late, and Voltaire was interred.

The French academy had obſerved a cuſtom of ſaying maſs at the church of the Cordeliers for each of their deceaſed members. The archbiſhop of Paris, Beaumont, ſo well known by his ignorance and fanaticiſm, prohibited the performance of the ceremony. The Cordeliers obeyed with regret; but they knew that the confeſſors of the archbiſhop would pardon his ſpirit of revenge, and would forbear to recommend juſtice to him. The academy, therefore, reſolved to ſuſpend the practice of this ceremony till the inſult offered

to the moſt illuſtrious of its members ſhould be repaired. Thus Beaumont became, in deſpight of himſelf, the inſtrument of deſtroying a ridiculous ſuperſtition.

Mean while the king of Pruſſia commanded a ſolemn maſs to be ſaid for Voltaire in the catholic church of Berlin; and the academy of Pruſſia was invited to attend. But that which was more glorious to Voltaire, was, that the king in the field of battle, where at the head of an hundred and fifty thouſand men he defended the rights of the princes of the empire and impoſed laws on the Auſtrian power, wrote

the

the eulogium of that illuſtrious man, whoſe diſciple and friend he had been, and who perhaps had never pardoned him the unworthy and diſgraceful violence which he had endured at Franckfort, but towards whom the monarch was inceſſantly and involuntarily led by his natural taſte and his admiration of genius. This eulogium nobly compenſated for the mean vengeance of the prieſts.

Of all the enormities which, in the times of ignorance and ſuperſtition, the prieſts have obtained the power of committing againſt human nature with impunity, that which is exerciſed on the

the bodies of the deceased is unquestionably the least prejudicial; and, in the eyes of enlightened men, those outrages can appear no other than a title to renown. Yet, respect for the remains of men who have been dear to us is no prejudice; it is an affection inspired by nature herself, who has placed, in the recesses of our hearts, a veneration for every thing that can recal to our remembrance beings whom friendship or gratitude have rendered sacred to our feelings. The liberty of offering a sorrowful homage to their ashes is then a precious right to delicate minds, and the power of chusing that which their sensations shall dictate, cannot,

not, without injuſtice, be taken away; ſtill leſs may this conſolation be forbidden at the will of an intolerant ſect, who have uſurped, with an audacity too long endured, the right of controuling the thoughts of men, or of inflicting puniſhment for them.

Beſide, the empire of prejudice over the minds of the populace is not yet deſtroyed; a Chriſtian deprived of burial is ſtill, in the eyes of inferior people, the object of horror and diſdain; and this injuſtice is extended even to his family. If, indeed, the hatred of prieſts would purſue none but men who are immortalized by their works and whoſe glory

glory embraces all ages, we might pardon their deſpicable efforts; but their hatred may be attached to victims leſs illuſtrious; and all men have the ſame rights.

Government, in ſome degree aſhamed of its feeble conduct, hoped to eſcape public contempt by prohibiting the naming of Voltaire in any writings, or in thoſe places where the police was accuſtomed to violate the freedom of ſpeech, under the pretence of preſerving order, which it too often confounded with a reſpect paid to eſtabliſhed and protected follies.

The

The public papers were forbidden to ſpeak of his death; and the comedians had orders to perform none of his pieces. Miniſters did not diſcover that means like theſe, of preventing the anger of the nation againſt their weakneſs, would only ſerve more fully to provoke it; and to demonſtrate that they had neither courage to merit the approbation nor to ſupport the blame of the public.

This ſimple recital of the incidents of the life of Voltaire has ſufficiently developed his character and his mind; the principal features of which were benevolence, indulgence for human foibles, and a hatred of injuſtice and oppreſſion.

oppreſſion. He may be numbered among the very few men in whom the love of humanity was a real paſſion; which, the nobleſt of all paſſions, was known only to modern times, and took riſe from the progreſs of knowledge. Its very exiſtence is ſufficient to confound the blind partiſans of antiquity, and thoſe who calumniate philoſophy.

But the happy qualities of Voltaire were often perverted by his natural reſtleſſneſs, which the writing of tragedy had but increaſed. In an inſtant he would change from anger to affection, from indignation to a jeſt. Born with violent paſſions, they often hurried him

him too far; and his reſtleſſneſs deprived him of the advantages which uſually accompany ſuch minds; particularly of that fortitude to which fear is no obſtacle, when action becomes a duty, and which is not ſhaken by the preſence of danger foreſeen. Often would Voltaire expoſe himſelf to the ſtorm with raſhneſs, but rarely did he brave it with conſtancy; and theſe intervals, of temerity and weakneſs, have frequently afflicted his friends, and afforded unworthy cauſe of triumph to his cowardly foes.

His affections were permanent, and his friendſhip for Génonville, the preſident

ſident de Maiſons, Formont, Cideville, the Marchioneſs du Chatelet, d'Argental, and d'Alembert, ſeldom obſcured by paſſing clouds, ended only with his life. From his works we diſcover that few men of feeling have ſo long preſerved the remembrance of friends loſt in early youth.

He has been reproached with his numerous diſputes, but in none of theſe he was the aggreſſor. His enemies, thoſe at leaſt to whom he was irreconcileable, and whom he devoted to the world's contempt, did not confine themſelves to perſonal attacks; they were his accuſers to the fanatics, and wiſhed

wiſhed to bring down the ſword of perſecution on his head. It is no doubt afflicting to be obliged to place in this liſt men of real merit, men like the poet Rouſſeau, the two Pompignans *, Larcher, and even Rouſſeau of Geneva. But is it not more excuſable to carry vengeance too far, in ſelf-defence, and

* One of them has lately, by his noble and patriotic conduct, effaced the ſpots which his epiſcopal accuſations had fixed upon his reputation. He is at preſent ſeen to adopt the ſame principles of freedom, with fortitude, for which in his works he bitterly reproached philoſophers, and againſt which he invoked the vengeance of deſpotiſm. It would be wrong to accuſe him of wilful tergiverſation: nothing is more common than men who, to a worthy mind and integrity of underſtanding, join timidity; and dare not examine certain principles, nor think for themſelves on certain ſubjects, till firſt ſupported by public opinion.

to be unjuſt in the indulgence of anger, the firſt motive of which is founded in rectitude, than to violate the rights of man, by endangering the freedom and ſafety of a citizen, to gratify pride, the aims of hypocriſy, or an obſtinate attachment to opinions.

Voltaire has been cenſured, for his attacks on Maupertuis; but were not theſe attacks confined to the mere act of rendering a man eternally ridiculous, who, by baſe intrigues, had endeavoured to diſhonour and ruin him; and who, to revenge ſome jeſts, had called the power of a king, irritated by his inſidious arts, to his aid?

Voltaire, it is ſaid, was envious; which has been anſwered by the following line, from Tancred:

*De qui dans l'univers peut-il être jaloux* *?

*Yes, he was envious of Buffon.* What! could the man whoſe mighty arm had ſhaken the antique pillars of the temple of ſuperſtition, and who aſpired to metamorphoſe the vile herd which ſo long had groaned under the ſacerdotal rod into men, could he be envious of the lucky and ſplendid deſcription of the manners of a few animals, of the

* Does the world contain a man whom he might envy?

more or less fortunate combination of some systems, the falsity of which is proved by facts?

*He was envious of J. J. Rousseau.* The boldness of Rousseau did indeed excite that of Voltaire: but was the philosopher who beheld the progress of knowledge, polishing, emancipating, and perfecting the human species, and who enjoyed the revolution as his proper work, was he jealous of the eloquent writer who wished to condemn the mind of man to eternal ignorance? Could the enemy of bigotry be jealous of him who, not finding sufficient fame

in

in the deſtruction of its altars, vainly endeavoured to rebuild them?

Voltaire did not do juſtice to the genius of Rouſſeau, becauſe his mind being equitable, and void of affectation, felt an involuntary repugnance to exaggeration; becauſe a tone of auſterity preſented to his fancy a tincture of hypocricy, the ſmalleſt ſhade of which could not but diſguſt his frank and independent ſoul; and becauſe, being accuſtomed himſelf to treat all ſubjects with humour, gravity in the little details of paſſion, or of human life, always appeared to him to partake of the ridiculous. He was unjuſt, becauſe Rouſſeau

had angered him, by returning injury to offers of ſervice; had accuſed him of perſecution, when he was employed in his defence, and had himſelf directed the hand of perſecution toward Voltaire.

*He vons jealous of Monteſquieu.* He had cauſe to complain of the author of the ſpirit of laws, who affected to treat him with indifference, and almoſt with contempt; partly from fooliſh pride, and partly from timid policy. Yet the celebrated ſaying of Voltaire, that "Humanity had loſt its claims, and that Monteſquieu found and reſtored them," is the beſt eulogium ever pronounced

on

on the ſpirit of laws, and even exceeds the limits of juſtice. It is only true relatively to France; ſince, without mentioning the works of Althuſius* and ſome others, the rights of man were reclaimed with more energy and candour in the works of Locke and Sidney, than in thoſe of Monteſquieu.

Voltaire often criticiſed the ſpirit of laws, but uſually with juſtice. The proof that he was right, in attacking Monteſquieu, is that we now perceive the moſt abſurd and fatal prejudices

* A German lawyer, of the XVI. century, who maintained at that time that all power originated in the people.

finding ſupport by quoting works of that celebrated man; which, had not the progreſs of knowledge at length broken the fetters forged by the dogmas of authority, concerning queſtions which ought only to be ſubmitted to the teſt of reaſon, would in the preſent day have done more miſchief to France, than they have done good to Europe. The enthuſiaſtic partiſans of Monteſquieu have affirmed that Voltaire was incapable either of judging or of underſtanding his works. Irritated by ſuch aſſertions, he well might mingle a little ill humour with juſt remark; in which he would be ſanctioned by haughtineſs ſo ridiculous.

The

The fashion of taxing Voltaire with envy was so prevalent, that to this passion have been attributed his sage observations on the work of Helvetius; which, from respect to a persecuted philosopher, he had the delicacy not to publish during the life of that writer. Nay, his very anger at the short lived success of some ill written tragedies was called envy; as if anger could not be felt, except relatively to self, at seeing fame usurped, which is so often fatal to the progress of philosophy and the arts. How much has the praise so prodigally bestowed on Richelieu, Colbert, and other ministers, impeded the advancement of reason, in the science of politics!

While

While we read the works of Voltaire, we perceive no man perhaps ever poſſeſſed accuracy of underſtanding in a ſuperior degree. This he preſerved in the enthuſiaſm of poetry, as well as in the exuberance of humour; this was ever the guide of his taſte and of his opinions, and is one of the principal reaſons of the inexpreſſible charms which are diſcovered, in the peruſal of his works. No mind perhaps ever combined more ideas at a time, decided with more rapid ſagacity, or diſplayed more depth, in whatever required a laborious analyſis or continued meditation. The ſtrength of his eagle-eye often has aſtoniſhed even thoſe who

were

were indebted to ſimilar means for ideas the moſt profound, and combinations the moſt extenſive and preciſe. In converſation he has often been known to ſelect the beſt of a multitude of ideas, to arrange them in the moſt perſpicacious and effectual manner, and to clothe them in the moſt happy and brilliant language.

Hence the ineſtimable advantage of being ever clear and unaffected without inſipidity, and of being read with equal pleaſure by the moſt ignorant, as well as by the moſt enlightened. Reading his works with reflection, we find in them a multitude of profoundly

philo-

philoſophic and true maxims; which eſcape ſuperficial readers, becauſe they do not enforce attention, nor require any effort to be underſtood.

If we conſider him as a poet, we ſhall find that, of the various ſpecies which he attempted, the ode and comedy were the only ones in which he did not deſerve the higheſt rank. He failed in comedy, becauſe, as it has previouſly been remarked, he had the gift of ſeizing the ridiculous of opinion, but not of character, ſuch as could be put in action, and which alone is proper for comedy. Not that, in a country where the

the mind of man ſhould have freed itſelf from all its bonds, and in which philoſophy ſhould have become popular, abſurd and dangerous opinions might not be ſucceſsfully exhibited on the ſtage: but this kind of freedom is at preſent no where to be found.

To him poetry is indebted for the liberty of exerciſing itſelf in a field more vaſt. He has ſhewn how it may be united with philoſophy; ſo that poetry, without being deprived of any of its charms, riſes to new beauties; and philoſophy, without being dry or inflated, preſerves its accuracy and depth.

We

We cannot read his theatrical writings, without observing that to him the tragic art is indebted, for the whole progress which it has made since Racine: nor can even those who refuse him superiority, or equality, of poetical talents, without stupidity or injustice, deny this progress. His latter tragedies prove, that he was far from supposing he had carried this so difficult art to its utmost extent: he was sensible that tragedy might still approach more nearly to nature, without being deprived of its pomp and dignity; that it still addicted itself too much to local manners; that the love of women was a too frequent subject; that their pas-

sions

ſions ought to be repreſented on the ſtage as they exiſt in life, and their affection firſt diſcovered only by the efforts made to conceal it, and not publicly avowed, unleſs in thoſe moments when exceſs of danger, or of misfortune, no longer admit of diſguiſe. He thought too that characters void of affectation, great by nature, and ſtrangers to intereſt and ambition, might afford a ſource of new beauties, and impart to tragedy more variety and truth. But he became too feeble to execute his own conceptions; and, if we except the father of Irene, we ſhall find his latter tragedies rather leſſons than models.

If,

If, therefore, eſpecially in the arts, the man of genius be he who by enriching them has moſt extended their limits, who has merited this title more than Voltaire? yet has it been refuſed him by writers, moſt of whom were, indeed, too deſtitute of genius themſelves to feel its true characteriſtics.

To Voltaire we are indebted for having taken a more extenſive and uſeful view of hiſtory than the ancients. It has in his writings become, not a narrative of events, not the picture of the revolutions of a nation, but that of human nature, painted from the life, and the philoſophic reſult of the

experience

experience of all people, and of all ages. He first introduced true criticism into history; first shewed that the natural probability of accidents ought to be admitted, as proofs for or against historical authenticity; and that the philosophic historian ought, not only to reject miracles, but scrupulously to examine the motives for crediting those facts which depart from the common order of nature.

Perhaps he may occasionally have forgotten the sage rule which he himself invented, and which, rigorously adhered to, may demonstrate truth. Still to him we are indebted for having

freed history from that croud of extraordinary incidents, adopted without proof, which, making the greateſt impreſſion on the mind, blinded men to the moſt natural and the beſt demonſtrated facts. Before his time men knew little of hiſtory, except the fables by which it was diſfigured. He ſhewed that the abſurdities of polytheiſm had never been the religion of any but the vulgar, among the greateſt nations; and that the belief of one God, common to all people, had no need of being revealed by ſupernatural means. He proved that all nations have practiſed the grand principles of morality, and with increaſing purity in proportion as they were more civilized

civilized, and better informed. He taught us that the influence of religion has often corrupted, but never improved morality.

As a philoſopher, he was the firſt to afford an example of a private citizen, who, by his wiſhes and his endeavours, embraced the general hiſtory of man in every country and in every age, oppoſing error and oppreſſion of every kind, and defending and promulgating every uſeful truth.

The hiſtory of whatever has been done in Europe, in favour of reaſon and humanity, is the hiſtory of his la-

bours and beneficent acts. If the abfurd and dangerous cuſtom of interring the dead within the walls of cities, and even in churches, has been abolished in ſome countries; if, on the continent of Europe, men, by means of innoculation, have, in part, eſcaped a diſeaſe which threatened life, and often was deſtructive of happineſs; if the catholic clergy have loſt their dangerous power, and will ſoon be deprived of their ſcandalous wealth; if the liberty of the preſs be increaſed; if Sweden, Ruſſia, Poland, Pruſſia, and the dominions of the houſe of Auſtria have beheld the tyranny of intolerance vaniſh; if even in France, and ſome of the provinces

of Italy, it has ſuffered attacks; if the ſhameful remains of feudal vaſſalage has been ſhaken in Ruſſia, Denmark, Bohemia, and France; if Poland now feels its injuſtice and danger; if abſurd and barbarous laws have been generally aboliſhed, or are threatened with approaching deſtruction; if the neceſſity of reforming the adminiſtration of public juſtice be every where felt; if the continent of Europe has been taught that men poſſeſs a right to the uſe of reaſon; if religious prejudices have been eradicated from the higher claſſes of ſociety, and in part effaced from the hearts of the common people; if their defenders have been reduced to the

ſhameful neceſſity of maintaining their political utility; if the love of humanity be now the common language of all governments; if wars ſhould become leſs frequent, and if the pride of kings, or claims which the ruſt of time has concealed, be no longer alledged as the pretence for their commencement; if we have beheld the maſk ſtripped from the face of religious ſectaries, who were privileged in impoſſing on the world; and if reaſon for the firſt time has begun to ſhed its clear and uniform light over all Europe; we ſhall every where diſcover, in the hiſtory of the changes that have been effected, the name of Voltaire; and ſhall every

where

where find him beginning the battle, or deciding the victory.

But generally obliged to conceal his intentions, and mask his attacks, though his works are in every hand, the principles of his philosophy are but little known.

Ignorance and error are the sole cause of the misery of man; and the errors of superstition are the most fatal, because they corrupt every source of reason; and their destructive enthusiasm teaches their adherents to commit crimes without remorse. That mildness of manners which is compatible with every

form of government diminiſhes evils, the cure of which reaſon muſt one day effect, and impedes their progreſs. Oppreſſion itſelf, in a humane nation, aſſumes the character of the people; and is rarely guilty of great barbarity, in a country where arts and eſpecially literature are beloved. Freedom of thinking is tolerated out of reſpect to them, though men want the fortitude to love it for its own ſake.

Our endeavours, therefore, ſhould be to inſpire the mild and conſolatory virtues, which lead to reaſon, which all men may practice, which agree with every poliſhed age, and which

may teach hypocriſy itſelf ſome good. They ſhould particularly be prefered to thoſe auſtere morals which ſeldom exiſt, in common minds, without a mixture of unfeeling ſeverity; which are to hypocriſy at once ſo eaſy and ſo dangerous; which often terrify tyrants but ſeldom conſole mankind; and the neceſſity of which proves the misfortune of thoſe nations whoſe hiſtory they adorn.

By informing mankind, and by rendering them more humane, we beſt may hope to lead them the ſureſt and eaſieſt road to freedom. But we neither can hope to ſpread knowledge nor

ſoften

ſoften the manners of nations, if frequent wars accuſtom them to the ſhedding of blood without remorſe, and to contemn the fame which awaits on the arts of peace; or if, occupied in oppreſſion or in ſelf-defence, men ſhould continue to eſtimate their virtue by the ill they have been able to do, and imagine the art of killing to be the art of moſt utility.

The more men are enlightened the more they will be free, and the leſs difficult will be the attainment of freedom. But let us not teach oppreſſors to form a league againſt reaſon; let us conceal from them the neceſſary and

firm

firm union which exiſts between knowledge and liberty; and let us not too ſoon inform them that a nation without prejudice muſt inſtantly be free.

If we except theocracies, it is the *immediate intereſt* of all governments that the people ſhould be humane and enlightened. Let us not teach them that their more *diſtant intereſt* is to leave men in a ſtate of ignorance. Let us not oblige them to chooſe between the intereſt of pride and that of repoſe and fame. To induce them to love reaſon, ſhe muſt always appear in a gentle and peaceful form; and, far from terrifying them by imprudent threats, while ſhe

aſks

aſks their ſupport muſt offer her own. If we attack oppreſſors before we have taught the oppreſſed, we ſhall riſk the loſs of liberty and the death of reaſon. Hiſtory affords proofs of this truth. How often, in deſpite of the generous efforts of the friends of freedom, has a ſingle battle reduced nations to the ſlavery of ages!

And what is the kind of liberty enjoyed by thoſe nations which have recovered it by force of arms, and not by the force of reaſon? It has been temporary freedom, and ſo diſturbed by ſtorms that it remains doubtful whether it were or were not an advantage. Have

not

not moſt of them confounded the forms of republicaniſm with the enjoyment of right, and the deſpotiſm of numbers with freedom. How many unjuſt laws, contrary to the rights of nature, have diſhonoured the code of all nations which have recovered their liberty, during thoſe ages in which reaſon was ſtill in its childhood!

Why not profit by this fatal experience, and wiſely wait the progreſs of knowledge, in order to obtain freedom more effectual, more ſubſtantial, and more peaceful? Why purchaſe it by torrents of blood, and inevitable confuſion, and give that to chance which time

time must certainly and without bloodshed bestow? In order to be more free and to be ever so, we should wait the time when men, released from their prejudices and guided by reason, will be worthy of freedom, because they will know what are its true claims.

What therefore is the duty of a philosopher? To attack superstition; to point out peace, wealth, and power to governments, as the infallible rewards of those laws which secure religious liberty; and to teach them how much they have to fear from priests, whose secret influence will ever menace the repose of nations in which the liberty

berty of the preſs is under the leaſt reſtraint. For, previous to the invention of the art of printing, it was impoſſible to ſhake off this ſhameful and fatal yoke: and, till ſacerdotal authority ſhall be entirely annihilated by reaſon, there will be no medium between abſolute ignorance and dangerous commotion.

The philoſopher will ſhew that, without freedom of thought, the ſpirit of the clergy muſt again produce aſſaſſination, tortures, proſcriptions, and civil wars; and that, by enlightening the people only can nations, and kings, be ſecured from ſuch ſacred crimes. He will

Were he to be reproached with repeating the same theme too often, and with too obstinately attacking errors in themselves beneath contempt, he will reply—They are not contemptible while credited by the vulgar. And, though it be less glorious to combat vulgar error than to teach new truths to sages, it is necessary, in order to break the bonds of reason and to open a free road to truth, to prefer utility to fame.

Instead of proving that superstition is the support of despotism, if he write to people under an arbitrary government, he will prove that it is the enemy of kings; and of these two truths

he will purposely dwell upon that which may aid the cause of humanity; and not on that by which it may be injured, because liable to be misunderstood.

Instead of declaring war against despotism, before reason shall have assembled sufficient powers, and calling nations to the banners of freedom, who neither love it nor understand what freedom is, he will enumerate to them and their governors the various oppressions which are common to them all, and which it is as well the interest of those who command as of those who obey to root out. To simplify and humanize the laws, to counteract the oppression of subordinate

tyranny, to break off the ſhackles with which falſe policy may have encumbered the induſtry and liberty of trade, in order that freedom may be the only happineſs wanting to mankind, and that nations worthy of freedom may be preſented to her, ſuch will be his efforts, ſuch his theme.

Such is the reſult of the philoſophy of Voltaire, and ſuch the ſpirit which pervades his works.

Let men, who, if he had not written, would ſtill have been the ſlaves of prejudice, or would have trembled to confeſs they had ſhaken of its yoke,

accuſe Voltaire of having betrayed the intereſts of freedom, becauſe he defended it without fanaticiſm and imprudence; let them judge him by thoſe enlightened principles which were ten years poſterior to his death and half a century to his philoſophy, and which, but for him, had ever remained the ſecret opinions of ſages; let them condemn him for having diſtinguiſhed between the good, which may exiſt without liberty, and the happineſs to which liberty only gives birth; let them forbear to perceive that had Voltaire infuſed into his firſt writings the principles of freedom of the elder Brutus, or in other words of American independence,

pendence, neither Monteſquieu nor Rouſſeau would have written as they have done; that if, like the author of the *Syſtême de la Nature*, he had invited the kings of Europe to ſupport the power of the prieſts*, Europe would ſtill have been ſuperſtitious, and would long have remained in bondage; and let them forget that in books, as in behaviour, we ought to diſplay the courage only which the occaſion re-

* The tranſlator ſpeaks from memory, but he believes himſelf juſtified in ſaying that this accuſation of the author of the *Syſtême de la Nature* is falſe, whoſe doctrine, if he does not groſsly miſtake, was, that the deſpotic power of kings and prieſts was founded in reciprocal ſupport, and that deſpotiſm of every kind was equally hateful and deſtructive.

quires; their injuſtice will but little injure the glory of Voltaire. Men of genius muſt be his judges, men who can diſcover, in a ſucceſſion of various works, as well from their form and ſtyle as from their principles, the ſecret plan of a philoſopher, who is waging continual but bold and artful war on prejudice; rather intent on conqueſt than on renown; too great to be vain of his opinions, and too much the friend of the human race not to make their utility the grand object of his purſuits.

Voltaire has been accuſed of partiality to monarchial government, but this accuſation

accuſation only can impoſe on ſuch as have not read his works. It is true he hated, beyond even monarchial power, ariſtocratic deſpotiſm, which unites rigour to hypocriſy and tyranny more auſtere to morals more perverſe; nor was he ever the dupe of the parliaments of France, or the nobles of Sweden and Poland, who give the name of freedom to the chains with which they would load their vaſſals. In this opinion, Voltaire has been joined by all philoſophers who have fought the definition of a free ſtate in the nature and mind of man, and not, like the pedant Mably, in examples, drawn from

the tyrannical anarchies of Italy and Greece.

He has been blamed for having bestowed too much praise on the pomp of the court of Louis XIV., and accusation was in this instance well founded; it was the only prejudice of his youth which he never shook off, and there are few men who can hope they have vanquished all their errors. It has been asserted, that he supposed celebrated artists, orators, and poets, were all that were necessary to render a people happy, but never could he entertain such a thought. He supposed, indeed,

indeed, that arts and literature poliſhed the manners of men, and made the road of reaſon ſmooth and ſafe, and that the love of them rendered thoſe who govern beneficent of heart, often prevented them from committing acts of violence and injuſtice, and that, under equal circumſtances, the moſt ingenious and poliſhed people would always be the leaſt wretched.

His pious enemies have taxed him with having aſſaulted, by wilful miſquotation, the religion of his country, and extending incredulity even to atheiſm; both of which charges are equally falſe.

falſe. Among a multitude of objections, founded on proofs and on paſſages cited from books, ſuppoſed to have been inſpired by God himſelf, a very ſmall number of errors only can be diſcovered; and thoſe cannot be imputed to him as wilful miſtakes, becauſe, comparing them to the numerous accurate quotations and facts related with preciſion, it is evident that nothing could have been of leſs uſe to his cauſe. When contending with his adverſaries, his maxim continually was, nothing ought to be credited which is not proved, and every thing ſhould be rejected which is offenſive to reaſon and probability;

bability; and the answer he has continually received was, whatever cannot be demonstrated an impossibility ought to be adopted and adored.

He constantly appeared to be persuaded of the existence of a Supreme Being, but without remaining blind to the strength of the objections opposed to that opinion. While he thought he beheld the regular order of nature, he could not but perceive those striking irregularities which he was unable to explain.

This was his persuasion, though it was far from that absolute certainty in

the

the presence of which all difficulties vanish: the work entitled, *Il faut prendre un parti, ou le principe d'action**, perhaps contains the strongest proofs of the existence of a Supreme Being, which men have yet been able to collect.

He believed as much of free will as a rational man can believe; that is, he believed man has the power to resist inclination, and to weigh the motives of action.

His incertitude respecting spirit was almost absolute, and even concerning

* Decide we must, or the principle of action.

the

the exiſtence of the ſoul after the ceaſe of the body; but as he imagined this opinion, as well as that of the exiſtence of a God, was beneficial, he rarely allowed himſelf to mention his doubts, and generally dwelt rather on the proofs than on the objections.

Such was the philoſophy of Voltaire; and we, perhaps, ſhall find, while we read his life, that he has been more admired than known; that though gaul abounds in ſome few of his polemical writings, his predominant ſenſation was active benevolence; that his affection for the unfortunate exceeded his

his hatred of his enemies; and that the paſſion of fame in him was ever ſubordinate to the more noble love of humanity. Superior to the oſtentation of virtue, or to the concealment of his foibles, which he would ſometimes candidly confeſs, though not proudly proclaim, few men ever exiſted whoſe lives have been more honoured by acts of greater worth or leſs ſullied by hypocriſy. In fine, let it be remembered that when, on the pinnacle of fame, after having rendered the French ſtage illuſtrious by his genius, and while throughout Europe he exerciſed a degree of power over the minds of men hitherto

hitherto unparalleled, the following pathetic line,

*J'ai fait un peu de bien, c'eſt mon meilleur ouvrage**.

was the unaffected expreſſion of that habitual benevolence, which had taken poſſeſſion of his ſoul.

* The little good I've done, that is my beſt of works!

END OF THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE.

END OF THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE.